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LITTLE BRICKS

BY

DARLEY DALE



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L I T T L E B R I C K S.

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EDINBURGH AND LONDON





"Kneeling by her death-bed, he laid bare his soul to that merciful Lord Who alone had power to cleanse it in His redeeming blood." -
Page 220.

[Frontispiece.]

LITTLE BRICKS.

BY

DARLEY DALE,

AUTHOR OF

"A TEARFUL VICTORY," "THE BLACK DONKEY," "THE JERSEY BOYS,"
"HELEN LESLIE; OR, A LITTLE LEAVEN," ETC. ETC.



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LITTLE BRICKS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLUB IS STARTED.

LONDON is not the pleasantest place in the world on a hot September day; very few people would choose it as their abode at such a season, and the few who would prefer it are in all probability doomed to live in some charming but quiet little village in the country. The family with whom we have to do certainly did not spend September in London from choice; with them it was a matter of dire necessity.

Mr. Sandys was a clergyman. The parish of which he was rector lay in a poor and far from fashionable part of the great city, and he elected to live in his parish, not because he liked it, for on the contrary he disliked it exceedingly, nor because he was insensible to the charms of Mayfair or Belgravia or even of South Kensington, all of which places he would infinitely have preferred to the dingy square

in which his rectory was situated, but because Mr. Sandys was a man who acted from a higher motive than mere self-pleasing. Duty is a disagreeable word, I suppose, because it often, nay, generally implies disagreeable things, so I will not say he lived in the east end of London from a sense of duty ; he lived there for love, of Whom, I leave you to guess.

His annual holiday was just over, and the family had returned to town a few days before our story opens—returned to find London hotter and dirtier than they left it six weeks ago ; so the young Sandys thought, and very cross they were about it.

“ How hot it is here ! I wish we could have stayed another month at Weston,” said Gerard, a boy of fourteen, Mr. Sandys’s elder son, for he had but two.

“ Hot ! it is enough to scorch you. I can’t think why father wanted to drag us all back so soon,” said Harold, who was a year or two younger than his brother.

“ Utter humbug I call it ; all for the sake of this wretched parish, with its dirty squalling babies, its dirtier ragged boys and girls, and its dirtiest old women. What their charm is in Uncle Charlie’s eyes passes my understanding,” growled Roger, the eldest of the party, from a sofa on which he was kicking his heels in the air, in an attitude more remarkable for its ease than its grace.

“ Ah, but Roger, see how fond the people are of

Uncle Charlie, and what a deal he does for them ; no wonder he likes to get back to them. Why, what would become of them without him ? ” asked May, Roger’s only sister, a little girl of twelve, with a sweet pale face, and long, rippling golden hair.

“ Oh, they would get on right enough—‘ what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve for ; ’ besides, I think my uncle might consider us as well as the parish,” said Roger.

“ So he does, Roger ; he always takes his holiday to suit us ; we should have missed a week at school if we hadn’t come back on Tuesday,” said Gerard.

“ All the better if we had ; there is nothing to do here but lessons from morning till night ; no rides or drives or fishing or shooting”—began Harold.

“ That must be a great privation to such a swell shot as you are, Harold,” sneered Roger.

Guns, we may remark, were forbidden fruit to Harold, and only to be enjoyed secretly, and at the risk of being found out.

“ Or picnics or tennis, and even cricket and football will soon be over,” continued Harold, thinking it better to ignore Roger’s remark.

“ I wish we had a club to go to, as my father has,” said Roger.

“ Happy thought ! let’s start one for ourselves ; it will be something to amuse us this winter,” said Gerard.

"Capital! but where's the money to come from?" inquired Harold. "It will cost a lot, you know; we must take all the papers, 'Punch,' and all the illustrated ones at least, and the magazines, and then we shall want some cards and a billiard-table."

"Wouldn't the bagatelle board do, Harold?" suggested May, meekly.

"Well, it might at first, at any rate. And then we must have a cook; we shall want to dine there sometimes."

"When we are cut off our pudding at home, for instance," suggested Roger, to which punishment Harold was occasionally condemned for minor breaches of discipline.

"When we are late for dinner at home, or when we want to talk, I meant; but Roger always suggests the most disagreeable things he can think of. All I say is, where are we to get the money from?" said Harold.

"From our subscriptions, of course. A club that is not self-supporting is not worth belonging to," said Roger sententiously.

"How much are we to subscribe? because I have only eighteenpence a week, and I should like some of that for cigars and"—began Harold.

"Sweets," said Roger; "you never smoked a cigar in your life."

"Yes, I have, once," said Harold, "and I shan't smoke another in a hurry. I was only chaffing."

"May I belong to the club, Roger?" asked May timidly.

"Certainly not; clubs are for men, not for girls," said Roger. "A nice thing it would be if we were to have girls in it; they would be bringing their dolls with them."

"I have given up dolls for years and years," said May, "and I know some ladies belong to clubs, because I heard Uncle Charlie say so to some gentleman at dinner the other day."

"Yes, so they may, and a pretty sort of club it is, I daresay; but they never belong to gentlemen's clubs, you little muff."

"But, Roger, I thought as this wasn't a real club, it would not matter, and it will be so dull for me if you boys are always at the club."

"Not a real one! What do you mean, May? Of course it will be a real one; and look here, don't you begin whining about us always being at the club, like all women do, because I won't stand it, so I give you fair warning," said Roger.

Persuasion having failed, May resorted to another means to effect her object; she raised an objection to the plan altogether.

"I thought you boys had all promised Uncle Charlie to give up half your allowance to his Mission Room Fund; if you are going to give all your money to this club, you will have to break your promises."

"So we should, and father would not like that," said Harold.

"Look here," said Gerard, "I propose we combine the two, that is, that we start a club, all our subscriptions to go to the Mission Room, and any other money we may have to spare we can buy papers and magazines with. I don't see what we want with a billiard-table, seeing that none of us can play billiards, besides father would not allow us to try. There are plenty of cards in the house, and as for giving dinners, it is all humbug."

"O Gerard, what nice things you do think of! Do let us start this club; how pleased Uncle Charlie would be if we could collect enough money to build the room; and then how nice to know we had done it with our own money. How long would it take, do you think?" said May.

"That depends upon how many people join, and how much we make the subscription. The more we get, the sooner we shall be able to build the room, of course."

"Then, Roger, do let me join; my money will help. Will you?" pleaded May.

"Yes; if it is to be this sort of thing, you may as well. As long as we get the money it does not matter who belongs to it," said Roger.

"I don't agree with you there, Roger. We will only have people who live in the parish or take an interest in the church. To begin with, we must

form a committee and elect a president," said Gerard.

"Roger is the eldest; he had better be president," said Harold.

"All right," said Roger, much pleased at the honour conferred upon him. "Then I call the first meeting at once, and I take the chair. Gentlemen,—I can't say ladies and gentlemen, because there is only one lady present,—gentlemen and May, we are met together to form a club, the object of which you all understand, so there is no occasion for me to explain it to you."

"Hear, hear!" cried the audience.

"I therefore beg to propose at once that my friends, Mr. Gerard Sandys and Mr. Harold Sandys, be members of the committee. If any one objects let him hold up his hand."

There being no one present to object but the gentlemen themselves, except May, who counted for nothing, no one held up his hand.

"That resolution is carried then. Now, who else shall we have on the committee?"

"I propose May," said Harold.

"I second her," said Gerard.

"As president I have a casting vote" —

"O Roger! do give it in favour of me," interrupted May.

"May, if you interrupt the chairman you must be called to order; and if you do it a second time a

vote of censure must be passed against you and recorded in the minute-book," said Roger solemnly.

" We have not a minute-book yet, so never mind, May ; and, Roger, do let her be on the committee," said Gerard.

" I never said I objected. Did I, pray ?—only you are all in such a hurry. I vote for May, so she is elected ; and as we fellows have so much to do, and girls never do anything when their lessons are over, I propose that May be the secretary. You know, May, you must write beautifully, no scribbling, and you must spell properly, so it will be a very good thing for you."

" Oh, thank you, Roger ; I am so glad ! "

" Now we must have some more girls on the committee if we have May. We want two more, then we shall be an equal number. Who shall we have ? " asked the president.

" The Marshalls, of course. I propose them," said Harold.

" I object to Eve ; she is sure to upset the whole thing," said Roger.

" It won't matter if we have Mary as well ; she will do the club more good than Eve will do it harm," said Gerard.

" I don't see that ; but, however, we will have them if you like. Miss Secretary, will you write a letter and request the Miss Marshalls to be on the Committee of the—the—the club we are getting

up? You had better write the letter at once," said Roger.

"In the middle of the meeting?" asked May.

"Yes; and show it me before you send it."

"Wait a minute, Roger; we ought to name the club first," said Gerard.

"Of course we must name it; the question is what is the name to be?"

"What do you think of 'Little Bricks'?" asked Gerard.

"Silly, slangy, and senseless," politely rejoined Roger.

"I'll prove to you it is none of the three. It is not silly, slangy, or senseless; on the contrary, it is very *d'propos*; it has plenty of meaning, and it is not slang. I don't suppose one of you here knows the origin of the word 'brick' in its slang sense," said Gerard.

"What do you mean?" demanded Roger.

"It has a classical origin: When the walls of Sparta were demolished by order of Philopœmen, the Spartans ranged themselves round the city, declaring that while they lived the walls were still standing, for every man was a *brick*, and it was only over his dead body that the enemy could enter the city. So you see a brick really means a noble and brave man who is willing to sacrifice his life for his country."

"Humph!" said Roger, "it strikes me as being pretty conceited"—

"Bad grammar!" interrupted Harold.

"Awfully conceited, if you prefer it, to call ourselves bricks, if that is the meaning of the word."

"But we are only to be the 'Little Bricks.' We shall have to make a little sacrifice, you know, Roger; we shall have to give up part, if not the whole, of our pocket-money."

"Besides, Roger, if we help with our money to build the room, we shall each be one of the bricks in it," said May.

"Don't talk nonsense, May; your metaphor is confused," said Roger.

"May means we shall each contribute our mite, our money, our little brick to the building of the room, which can't be built without bricks—the bricks can't be bought without money—the money can't be got without us—therefore we build the room, in which sense we are little bricks. Isn't that what you mean, May?" asked Gerard.

"Yes," said May, "and I think it is a capital name for the club. The only thing is, will Uncle Charlie guess what it means when he hears it, for of course we must keep the object a secret?"

"How like a girl! they never care for anything unless it is a secret. If their hair wants cutting they make a mystery about it," said Roger.

"I agree with May; it would be much nicer not to let father know anything about it till we have the money, because we are doing it to please him. We

must tell him about the club of course, because we shall want a room," said Gerard.

"Wait, Gerard, let us settle one point first, before we go to another. Shall we decide to call it 'The Little Bricks'?" asked the president.

"Yes," was the unanimous reply.

"Very well, then. It is resolved that this club be called 'Little Bricks.' Now then, May, fire away at that letter to the Marshalls. The next question is, where is the club-room to be? We must have a room for committee meetings, besides all the members must meet on certain days to pay their subscriptions, and they must have a place to meet in."

"It strikes me that is all the members will do, meet and pay their subscriptions," said Gerard.

"Quite enough too; the committee will have all the trouble, it is only fair they should have the fun to themselves," said Roger.

"Boys, I know the very place for it, if we could only get it—Uncle Charlie's parish-room," said May, looking up from her first letter on behalf of the club.

This parish-room, as the children called it, was a room built out at the back of the house, in which Mr. Sandys frequently held meetings of district-visitors and Sunday-school teachers, and Bible classes, and was much coveted by his young people as a play-room, because they could make as much noise as they pleased without disturbing any one in the house. Mr. Sandys, however, could never be persuaded to

give up this room altogether, though he occasionally lent it to them.

As May said, this was the very place for the club to meet, and if only they could persuade Mr. Sandys to allow them to use it, a great point would be gained. When the various advantages of this room had been fully discussed, it was finally decided that a deputation should at once wait upon Mr. Sandys and see if any arrangement could be made.

The deputation consisted of May and Gerard, May having volunteered her services, and the rest of the committee decided Gérard was the most likely person to gain a hearing from his father. While they are gone we will just say a few words about the family.

Roger and May were the children of Colonel Sandys, a younger brother of Mr. Sandys, the greater part of whose life had been spent in India, from whence, on the death of their mother, the children had been sent home and placed under the charge of their mother's sister. Here they remained for four or five years, when Colonel Sandys came home from India on leave, and being very much displeased with the way in which his children were being brought up, he decided to leave them with his brother until he was able to come home and take care of them himself.

The change was very great to the children, and was one that could not fail to have a great effect on their characters, but inasmuch as transition periods

are seldom remarkable for their beauty, we doubt whether the effect was at present altogether to be admired.

As regarded Roger it certainly was not ; he was several years older than his sister, and the bad training to which he had been subjected had taken deeper root in him than in May. Moreover, May had taken a great fancy to her Uncle Charlie the first time she saw him, and this fancy had deepened into a passionate, almost into a romantic love for him ; so with her Mr. Sandys had a much easier task than with Roger.

They had apparently never been taught to value truth in any way ; their one object in life seemed to be to evade punishment, by what means they cared little, so long as their end was attained. This was naturally a stronger instinct in Roger than in May, who was less disposed to get into scrapes by eating forbidden fruit.

They were remarkably ignorant of all religious knowledge, so much so that on their first arrival the Sandys were very much scandalised by their ignorance, though this was no fault of the children's. Roger, however, had a great objection to learn anything of the kind, professed to think it all cant, and caused Mr. and Mrs. Sandys no little anxiety by airing these views in the presence of his cousins. They had no trouble of this sort with May ; from the very first she showed great reverence for her

uncle, as well as for his teaching, and apparently tried to live up to it, in spite of Roger's efforts to make her follow his example.

Poor little May was often terribly distressed when the two people she most loved and admired, Roger and her Uncle Charlie, were each trying to lead her in opposite directions.

Their cousins, Gerard and Harold, were very different in character, as well as in appearance. Gerard was very fair and delicate, unable to join much in any violent exercise, and in the winter often confined to the house for weeks by a cough. Harold, the younger of the two boys, was a regular pickle, always getting into mischief, and never knowing what it was to be ill even for a day.

Such were the principal members of the committee of the club of "Little Bricks."

CHAPTER II.

EVE AND MARY AT HOME.

MR. and MRS. SANDYS were enjoying a quiet half-hour together, an unusual luxury, for Mr. Sandys was very popular among his congregation, and was constantly being sent for, often more for the pleasure of his society than for any real need. This quiet interval was on the present occasion disturbed by the entrance of May and Gerard.

“ What is it, May ? ” said Mr. Sandys, putting his arm round May’s neck as she sidled up to him.

“ Please, Uncle Charlie, do you mind coming into the next room for a minute ? —Gerard and I want to speak to you.”

Whether Mr. Sandys minded or not is not recorded ; at any rate he went, and May preferred her request, waxing quite eloquent as she grew excited.

“ What do you think about it, Gerard ? ” asked Mr. Sandys when May had finished.

“ I think it will be a very good thing for us all, father, and if you will lend us your room every Saturday afternoon, we shall be very much obliged to you.”

" Well, I suppose I must consent, but on one condition. I can't have my writing-table moved or the things put away every Saturday, so you must promise me that no one shall touch that; it won't be the least in your way in the recess where it now stands, and you may do as you like with the rest of the room; but make the others understand that if that table is ever touched, you will have to find another room for your club. I can trust you two, I know, but I am not so certain of the others, so perhaps I had better speak to them myself. When is your next meeting to be ? "

" Next Saturday ; but you don't want to come to it, do you, Uncle Charlie ? " asked May anxiously.

" You evidently don't want to have me, Miss May," said Mr. Sandys, pinching May's ear as he spoke.

" I should like to be always with you ; it is not that, Uncle Charlie, only there is a secret," explained May.

" Very well, I understand. I won't endeavour to penetrate the mystery, nor will I delay the proceedings by my presence. I am not sure that it would not be better though, if you were to let me be a kind of sleeping partner in the club, to be called in if any disputes or difficulties should arise. Will you ask the committee, and tell me on Saturday afternoon what they decide ? "

The only person likely to object to this arrange-

ment was Roger, the Marshalls sharing May's admiration for her uncle, and Gerard and Harold thought there was no one in the world like their father, so as Roger would certainly be in a minority, May and Gerard felt they might safely promise the committee would raise no objection. And certainly if any quarrels did arise, it would be hard to find any one more capable of settling them than Mr. Sandys.

He was one of those great, strong, stern men, who have a profound tenderness for women and children ; and this same tenderness, coupled with strength of mind and body, was one of his great attractions. Children all loved him ; grown-up people were sometimes afraid of him. They did not guess at the sweetness that lay hidden beneath that hard and somewhat rugged exterior, until they sent for him in sickness or sorrow, and then his wonderful sympathy soothed as much as it surprised them.

There was another class of persons who loved more than they feared him,—the sinful, young or old, men or women. He might be hard enough on the sin, he was gentleness itself to the sinner. He was not one of the “unco” good. He was by no means perfect ; he had his faults like other people, and perhaps it was because he knew how hard it is to be good that he was so kind to those who went wrong. He was one of those of whom it is said that :

“They who fain would love Thee best,
Are conscious most of wrong within.”

But we must leave Mr. Sandys, and follow May, who on her return to the schoolroom was sent at once with her letter to the Marshalls, who lived next door, and with whom the Sandyses were on most intimate terms, especially May, who was being educated with the two eldest girls, Eve and Mary, by a resident governess.

"Well, Miss May, and are you condemned to lessons this afternoon?" asked Dr. Marshall, a burly man with a rather red face, more remarkable for its good-humour than its intellect.

"No," said May, "I have only come to see the girls," and she darted past Dr. Marshall, evading his attempt to kiss her, a proceeding he was very fond of, and one which May specially disliked, considering herself too old for such practices.

"Where is Miss Helder?" asked May, as she entered the schoolroom, now occupied by two girls about her own age, and a little boy in knickerbockers, who was crying over a sum.

"I don't know," said Mary Marshall.

"I do," said Eve; "do you want her?"

"Oh, no, I am glad she is not here; I want to tell you a great secret, and I was afraid she would come in and interrupt us."

"She won't come in till you have finished, you need not be afraid; what is it?" said Eve.

"How do you know she won't, Eve? She said she should be back directly to correct Jack's sum."

"She won't, though ; I have locked her up in her room, and she shan't come out till I choose."

"Eve!" exclaimed May and Mary in horror-stricken tones, "how could you?"

"Could I indeed? You don't suppose I am going to have that woman in here on Wednesday afternoon, do you? We have enough of her in the week without being saddled with her on half-holidays."

"But, Eve, what will she do? She will be in such a rage, and you will catch it," said Mary.

"We all shall, that is the worst of it; we all have to suffer for Eve's misdoings. Miss Helder always vents her rage on us. She will be keeping us all in on Saturday afternoon, and there is a committee-meeting," said May.

"A committee-meeting! What has that to do with us?" demanded Eve.

"I forgot that is part of the secret; but I can't tell you before Jack," said May.

"Here, Jack, just put down any figures that come into your head, quick; there is a good boy. Now run up to Nurse and play; Miss Helder is safe till tea-time, and you go to bed directly after," said Eve.

"Eve, do let me go and unlock the door for Miss Helder before May tells us the secret?" begged Mary.

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing; so begin, May,"

and Eve settled herself in Miss Helder's easy-chair to listen to all that we already know.

Miss Helder was wont to say of her two elder pupils that one was pretty, and the other was good, a remark she always made in a tone that implied the pretty one was certainly not good, nor the good one pretty; and she was partly right. Eve was undoubtedly pretty, and as certainly not good; she was a beautiful child, very fair, with a lovely complexion, long golden curly hair, by the side of which May's looked almost sandy; large dark eyes and eyelashes, and a remarkably pretty mouth. She was quite aware of her beauty, and yet did not appear to care much about it, never troubled herself about her dress, and was always more anxious that Mary should have pretty dresses than herself. She might be called self-conscious, but, perhaps, she could not help this; people always turned to look at her in the street; and she was so often told she was beautiful that she could not help knowing it; and with all her faults Eve was not vain.

As for Mary, she was certainly good, and some people thought her pretty too when she was away from Eve. She was pale, with dark, short, curly hair, and a sweet and rather sad face, whose large eyes redeemed it from being called plain.

"What is that noise?" said May, interrupting the discussion on the club to draw attention to a distant knocking.

"It is Miss Helder! O Eve! I forgot all about her. Where is the key?" said Mary.

"I don't know," said Eve.

"Don't know! O Eve! what shall we do? We shall have to send for a locksmith, and then mother will hear of it," said Mary.

"Nonsense, Mary; let the old worry alone, and let us hear more about the club," said Eve.

"I can't, Eve; I must go up and speak to her, and tell her if we can't find the key soon, we will send for a man to pick the lock," said Mary.

"May," said Eve, when Mary had gone on her errand of mercy, "have you asked St. John Wood to belong to the committee?"

"No; I don't think Roger wishes to have him," said May.

"Never mind what Roger wishes. I wish to have him, and I mean to have him; not for myself, because I like Gerard better, but for you and Mary; so write a note and ask him now."

"I can't, Eve. Roger is the president, and he would be very angry if I did."

"Roger the president, indeed! I call Mr. Sandys the real president; he is going to settle all the rows, and I know we shall have some. It won't be any fun if we don't. Besides, May, you are the secretary; it is your place to write the letters."

"When the committee tell me to; not on my own account. Besides, Eve, I can't offend Roger even to please you."

"Never mind. You are much fonder of Roger than he deserves; why, I can't make out. I never care for people that don't make a fuss about me, except for Mr. Sandys, I forgot him, but I know he likes me, so it is all the same. I'll propose St. John on Saturday, and see if I don't have him on the committee or my name is not Eve, and I wish it was not. Well, Mary, how is Miss Helder?"

"She is so angry, Eve. Do tell me where the key is. She declares she'll leave, and that she'll give notice to papa as soon as she gets out," reported Mary.

"Then the longer she keeps in there the better—that is all I have to say," said Eve.

"Don't you really know where the key is, Eve, because I must go and ask mother to send for a locksmith if you don't?" said Mary.

Rattle! rattle! rattle! went the handle of the door. Knock! knock! knock! went Miss Helder's knuckles upon it, and on hearing these cheerful sounds Eve went into peals of laughter, such silvery laughter, like the rippling of a shallow river over a rocky bed, in which May and finally Mary joined heartily.

Mary was the first to recover, exclaiming:

"But really, Eve, it is no joking matter either for poor Miss Helder, or you, when she gets out."

"That is the very reason why I wish to postpone her release," said Eve.

"Do tell me, Eve, do you know where the key is?" said Mary, looking quite frightened, as the enormity of Eve's offence struck her more forcibly every minute Miss Helder was kept in prison.

"I do, and I don't," said Eve oracularly.

"What do you mean, Eve dear? Poor Mary is ready to cry. Do tell us," cried May.

"I know it is in the back-garden, because I threw it there, but whereabouts I have not the remotest idea," said Eve, making a great show of preparing her lessons.

"Then we must go and look for it directly. I'll go and call out to Miss Helder that we have nearly found it, and then I'll come and help you two to find it," said Mary.

"I can't possibly spare time to look for it. I am going to write my German exercise," said Eve, sitting demurely down at the table, surrounded with books.

"I'll go," said May, and off she went to the yard at the back of the house, called by courtesy the garden, where she was shortly joined by Mary, and the next twenty minutes were spent in hunting for the key, the search being directed from

the window by the imprisoned and angry governess.

At length, just as Miss Helder's patience was exhausted, and she peremptorily ordered the two girls to go indoors and send for a smith, May spied the key in a pail which was standing in the yard whither Eve had pitched it.

Mary and May were as frightened as pleased at the success of their search, and they had some discussion as to who should venture to open the door, neither of them daring to do so. At last they decided to send the housemaid. May was very curious to see what would happen on Miss Helder's release, but as soon as she heard the door open she beat a hasty retreat, preferring the teasing of the boys at her cowardice to braving the incensed lady.

"Where is Dr. Marshall?" was Miss Helder's first question as soon as she was free, and on hearing he was in his consulting-room, she immediately made her way thither.

"Dr. Marshall, I must ask you to look out for another governess for your children; after the treatment I have received this afternoon, you can hardly expect me to remain any longer."

"Dear me, dear me, Miss Helder, I am very sorry to hear it; what have those young monkeys been up to?"

"I have been locked in my own room exactly two hours by Eve," said Miss Helder, pale with anger.

"Then, my dear lady, if I were you, I should pay my lady out by locking her in her room for the rest of the evening," said Dr. Marshall, successfully suppressing a strong inclination to laugh.

"Perhaps you will have the kindness to send her there yourself, for I have not the power," said Miss Helder.

"Certainly, if you wish it I will. Where is Eve?" said Eve's father, preparing to follow Miss Helder on what was to him a most distasteful errand.

Miss Helder took him to the schoolroom, where Eve was working away at her German, looking the picture of innocence, and a very lovely picture of it too.

"Eve, what is this I hear of you? Is it really true that you have locked Miss Helder in her room for two hours?" asked Dr. Marshall, trying to look very angry, but not succeeding as well as Miss Helder could have desired.

"Yes, papa," said Eve, nodding her pretty head as she spoke, "I locked her in because she was cross to little Jack, and wanted to spend the afternoon in the schoolroom, when it is our half-holiday."

"But this sort of thing won't do at all, Eve; I must put a stop to it at once. Miss Helder, will you lock this naughty girl up in her room for the rest of the evening, please?" and not waiting for an answer,

Dr. Marshall left the schoolroom, by no means pleased with Miss Helder, for he worshipped his daughter Eve, and indulged her in every possible way, and to scold or punish her was as new as it was a painful thing to him.

Eve was so taken aback by her father's interference in the matter, that, to the surprise of Miss Helder and Mary, she rose to obey.

"You need not trouble yourself to come upstairs and lock the door, Miss Helder; I will lock it myself *on the inside*, for I prefer being upstairs until every one is in a better temper than at present," said Eve.

Miss Helder, however, was determined to have the satisfaction Dr. Marshall had promised her, so she followed her mischievous pupil upstairs, and having seen her safely in her room, locked the door and put the key in her pocket.

Eve's room corresponded to May's in the next house, and as the wall was too thick to distinguish voices, they had established a system of communicating with each other by knocks and a kind of telegraphic arrangement. Two large balls of thick string were the wire of this primitive telegraph, one end of which was in May's room, the other was passed through the windows of both rooms into Eve's. The message was tied on to the string, and then, the attention of May being attracted by sundry knocks, Eve let out her string, and May

wound up hers until the message reached her. Thus the news that Eve was confined to barracks for the evening soon became known to the Sandyses, and much sympathy from May and the boys was speedily expressed for the victim.

More substantial tokens of commiseration were conveyed by the same means in the shape of some cakes and chocolate, at the suggestion of Gerard, which were received with much gratitude.

The communications came to a somewhat abrupt termination shortly after, when Eve, having sent a message requesting St. John Wood be at once invited to join the club, she received a reply, signed by the committee, saying the president objected strongly to the proposal, and begged he might hear no more on the subject.

This high tone did not suit Eve at all, and she sent back the answer :—

“ Who is the president ? and what do I care for him ? If you don’t ask St. John, I will.”

Then came a slight catastrophe ; a sudden jerk was given to the rope from May’s room, and Eve not having secured her end, it was pulled through the window, and thus the chain of communication was cut off for that day at least.

“ That is Roger’s doing, I know, it is just like him ; but I will be even with him yet. He has some reason for not wishing St. John to join, but it is no use ; I have made up my mind he shall be on

the committee, and he shall," said Eve to herself as she proceeded to while away the rest of the evening as best she could. Apparently she took refuge in bed, for when Mary came up, an hour earlier than usual, having persuaded Miss Helder to let her do so, Eve was sound asleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRESIDENT GETS INTO TROUBLE.

ROGER and his cousin Harold went to one of the public schools in the city, and thus they were thrown very much together ; for Gerard, on account of his health, was educated at home by his father, and consequently was less under the influence of Roger than his brother Harold.

St. John Wood was a monitor at this school, and the son of one of the masters, who was an old college friend of Mr Sandys. The families were still very intimate, and when Roger first went to the school, St. John, who was some years older, had helped him over many a rough bit of ground ; in point of fact, he was one of Roger's best friends, and had given him a substantial proof of this about two months before the idea of starting a club had entered the boys' heads.

It happened in this way. Roger one day came to St. John with a very long face and in great distress because he had lost his lexicon, and, as he explained, he did not like to ask his Uncle Charlie to get him another, as he had only had the lost one about six

months. He could not possibly get on without one, nor could he afford to buy one out of his allowance, unless he could borrow the money and pay it back in weekly instalments.

Hearing this, St. John offered to lend him two pounds, which was to be paid back at the rate of a shilling a week, an arrangement which was readily agreed to by both parties. The first fortnight after receiving the two pounds, Roger duly paid his shillings, then he went to Wood and asked if it would be equally convenient to him if he were paid monthly. Wood agreed, and thought no more about the matter, until, at the end of the first month, Roger, instead of paying him, suggested that the payments should be quarterly; it would save a deal of trouble and be so much more convenient, he argued.

Wood now began to suspect there was something wrong in all this, so he answered coldly, "All right, let it be quarterly; but mind, if you don't fork out at the end of this quarter, I will make it rather warm for you."

Roger promised he would certainly pay him at Michælmas, but Michælmas was getting very close, and he found it would be impossible. His allowance was half-a-crown a week, but that was all wanted for another purpose.

What that purpose was we shall presently see. Suffice it to say, this was the reason he did not wish

St. John Wood to join the "Little Bricks;" on the contrary, he wished to see as little of him as possible, and he avoided him in every possible way.

Saturday afternoon had been fixed for the next committee-meeting, and it was to be held in Mr. Sandys's parish-room, much to the delight of the members. The only one who did not seem in good spirits was Roger, and he was put out, firstly, because he knew Eve would propose the election of Wood; and secondly, because he did not at all approve of his Uncle Charlie acting as umpire to any quarrels which might arise.

"How did you leave Miss Helder, Eve?" asked Gerard, when the Marshalls arrived. "Is she in custody?"

"No," said Eve, "I thought I would be merciful to-day, and let the poor thing enjoy herself."

"Perhaps you thought discretion the better part of valour," suggested Roger.

"Have you sent a letter to St. John yet, Roger?" quickly rejoined Eve.

"No," said Roger, "we don't want any more on the committee; we are an even number as it is, three boys and three girls."

"That is the very reason why we wish St. John to make an odd number. Then, you know, Roger dear, you, as president, will be able to give a casting-vote whenever we are equally divided," said Eve, looking sweetly at Roger.

"There is something in that," said Roger.

"Yes," said Eve, "besides, you understand everything so well, that your decision is sure to be right." Roger, like the rest of his sex, was not proof against flattery, and if he had not had such strong private reasons of his own in the background, would certainly have swallowed the bait which Eve held out so temptingly.

"I tell you what we will do, Eve; when we have finished the rest of our business, we will ballot for Wood; the bagatelle balls will do to ballot with, and the black ball will exclude him. Of course, I as president shall not vote; I shall only look on and see fair play," said Roger.

This proposition met with universal approval, and as all were in favour of St. John, the others considered his election as good as secured.

"I wish Uncle Charlie would be punctual; it is three o'clock, and we want to begin at three. We have a great deal to do to-day, and he is sure to keep us half-an-hour when he does come," grumbled Roger.

"Here he is," said May, as the door leading to the room they were in was heard to swing to with a bang, and the next minute Mr. Sandys appeared. He was warmly welcomed by the three girls, all of whom managed to cling to him in some way as he addressed the meeting.

"I understand this is a secret society, and I have no wish to pry into your secrets, so I will only ask

you one question, dear children : Is the secret one I should approve of if I knew it ? I know I can trust you all to tell me if it is not."

"It is, it is!" exclaimed all unanimously.

"That will do then on that point," said Mr. Sandys, smiling. "The next thing I wish to say to you is that you are welcome to use this room of mine on one condition. You all see that table now in such a delightful state of confusion. Well, you must all promise me never to touch it. If you were to disarrange or lose any of my papers, it might give me some hours' work ; besides, it is quite possible I might leave some letters there I should not wish any one to see ; not that I for one moment suppose any of you would dream of reading them. With that one exception you are at liberty to do as you like in this room. You may read any books which you find to interest you, you may use my writing materials on this centre table, you may play on the harmonium ; in short, you may do anything except touch my writing-table. Now will you promise me ?" and Mr. Sandys looked sharply at Eve as he spoke, knowing that young lady's tendency to follow in the steps of her great namesake, but Eve shook her curls over her face with a dexterous jerk, so that he could not catch her eye.

"Will you promise ?" he asked again, giving Eve a little pull by one of her hands which he had hold of.

"Yes, we promise," answered all but Eve.

"Eve, will you promise?"

"Yes," said Eve, looking up archly, "I promise, but I don't promise to keep my promise. I might forget."

"If you do, all the others will have to suffer, because if that table is touched, out you all go; so understand that, will you, please?"

A confused murmur was the reply.

"The other point I wanted to mention is this. I find you have rather a young president, though I have no doubt he will be a very efficient one, but still, if any difficulty should arise which an older head than Roger's could perhaps solve better than he, or if there should be any disputes that cannot be settled amicably, will you let me help you? I need not interfere with your secret in any way, you know; what do you say to this?"

"We should like to have you to help us," said Gerard, acting as spokesman.

"You have no objection, Roger my boy, I hope, have you?" said Mr. Sandys, turning to Roger, who looked as though no dairy would be the better for a visit from him, so sour was his expression.

"Oh, no, Uncle Charlie; but I think we can manage very well," he answered sulkily.

"Then, I won't keep you any longer, so good-bye, my children, and God bless your work, whatever it may be," and with this Mr. Sandys left the room.

"I suppose it is getting on for half-past three. I

had better take the chair," said Roger, seating himself in a large easy-chair he had previously placed at the head of the table. "Ladies and gentlemen—The first thing we have to decide to-day is, how much is the subscription to this club called 'Little Bricks' to be?"

This momentous question led to a great deal of somewhat excited conversation among the members, who discussed their pecuniary affairs with great freedom.

"I have only eighteen-pence a week, but I'll give a shilling to the club," said Harold.

"I have two shillings, and I'll give it all," cried May.

"So have we, and we will give it all too," said Eve, speaking for herself and Mary.

"No, Eve, we must not do that, because we must buy our gloves out of it, so I don't think we can spare more than eighteen-pence," interposed Mary.

"I will give eighteen-pence; I shall then have sixpence left for pocket-money," said Gerard.

"What stuff you all talk," interrupted the president; "one going to give half-a-crown, and another two shillings, another eighteen-pence, and somebody else a shilling. You must all give the same. Who ever heard of a club where one member's subscription was two or three times as much as the rest of the club? You pay your

money for the privilege of belonging to the 'Little Bricks.'"

"No, Roger, we give our money to build the room, not for the sake of belonging to the club," said Eve.

"Oh, well, whatever we give it for, we had better all give the same, then there will be no jealousy," said Roger.

"Why can't we all subscribe the same, and then let those who wish to give more give it anonymously?" suggested Mary.

"A very good idea; we'll do it, Mary—we will do it. Here, one of you fellows propose it," said Roger.

"It is Mary's idea, let her propose it herself," said Eve.

"Girls never propose," said Roger.

"How funny," said Eve in a very sarcastic tone.

"I will propose it, and Harold will second it; so that point is settled. Now, the next question is, what is the amount to be?" said Gerard.

"I will thank you, Gerard, to attend to your business, and to leave me to attend to mine; I am quite capable of doing so without your help," said Roger.

"Go it; let us have a row to cheer us all up. This is rather slow work," said Harold.

"You can clear out if you think so. I vote the subscriptions be limited to one shilling a week. If we can get twenty members, we shall get over fifty

pounds a year, and I believe that would be enough, with what Uncle Charlie has, to build the room," said Roger.

"Allow me to say a few words before the question is formally put," said Gerard, rising to his feet, not because he had anything to say, but because he wished to hear his own voice.

Apparently no one else cared to do the same ; so while he was haranguing the meeting, the rest of the party were discussing the question in whispers. It was well known that Roger's allowance was larger than any of the other children's, and the general opinion was that it was exceedingly mean of him to suggest so small a sum for the subscription. However, when Gerard had finished making a fool of himself, as the other boys politely called it, the question was put to the vote, and the majority had it.

The next thing to be done was to make a list of the people to be invited to join the club, and this was a noisy as well as a lengthy proceeding, for every one had some objection to raise to every name that was proposed. The strange part was the girls always objected to the girls, although the boys had nothing to say against them, and *vice versa*.

For instance, when Roger proposed Agnes Cross, "She is too young," "She is too old," "She is so ugly," "She is so stupid," were a few of the objections raised.

Then when Eve suggested Horace Lamb, the boys sang out, "We won't have such a muff as he is," "He can't bowl a bit," "He is the biggest duffer in the school," "He will want his mother to come and fetch him," &c.

Finally the list was completed, apparently to the satisfaction of the committee, and the secretary was requested to write letters to each of the ladies and gentlemen in question, requesting them to become "Little Bricks."

"We have forgotten another thing: where is the money to be kept, and who is to keep it?" asked Harold.

"I shall, of course; I had thought of it, and I have brought down a cash-box that belongs to my father to keep it in," said Roger.

This was such an excellent idea, that Roger rose in the estimation of the committee, who began to congratulate themselves on having found a president equal to the occasion.

"I think we ought to make a rule to hand the money in to Father when we get over five pounds in the cash-box; it might get stolen if we kept it in this room," suggested Gerard.

"How should it? You don't suppose I meant to leave it about, do you? I am going to keep it in that cupboard, and take charge of the key," said Roger.

"Still, I don't think we ought to keep a large sum

of money in it; we can give it to father without telling him what it is for," said Gerard, and the others agreeing with him, Roger was over-ruled.

"Now about St. John Wood. How are you going to manage the balloting, Roger?" asked Eve.

"Easily enough. Harold, go and fetch the bagatelle balls, will you? And May, just go and see if you can find two bags large enough to hold them; Aunt Minnie will give you some, I daresay," said the president.

Harold and May ran off, and when they returned with the balls and bags, Roger put all the balls into one bag and took possession of the other.

"Now then," he said, "I am ready. Now all of you take a ball out of that bag and put it into this, and mind if you put the black ball in St. John is excluded. Fire away. You go first, Eve, and don't let any one see what colour your ball is."

"It does not matter whether they see or not. I am not going to blackball St. John," said Eve.

"Yes, it does matter, because some one else may, and the beauty of voting by ballot is, no one knows how any one else has voted," said Roger.

"They know if you like to tell them," said Eve.

"No one would tell except girls, who can't keep a secret, though they are always making one," retorted Roger.

The voting continued during this brief passage of arms between Eve and Roger. When all had put

their balls into the improvised balloting-box, the president opened it to see the result.

"Ladies and gentlemen—I am sorry to tell you Mr. St. John Wood is excluded from the committee of this club. I find he has been blackballed," announced Roger from the chair.

"I don't believe it; show us!" exclaimed Eve.

"There you are, Jewess," answered Roger rudely, as he turned the balls out of the bag on to the table; and there sure enough was the black ball among four red and white, for the president had declined to vote.

The committee looked dumfounded, and suspicion at first rested upon May, who they thought might have blackballed St. John by Roger's orders.

"May, did you do it?" asked Eve.

"No," said May, "I want St. John to join; indeed I didn't."

"Nor did I, upon my word of honour," said Harold.

"Nor I!" exclaimed Mary and Gerard simultaneously.

"Stuff and nonsense! Some one must have put it in. The ball could not have got in of its own accord. Where is the use of denying it? No one wants to know who put it in. All you have to do is to be quiet about it," said Roger.

"I beg your pardon, Roger, we do want to know who put it in. There has been some cheating, I am sure," said Gerard.

"It is my belief you put it in yourself, Roger," said Eve.

"Miss Eve Marshall, you have been guilty of gross disrespect to the chair, and unless you withdraw your words and apologise, it will be my painful duty to pass a vote of censure against you," said Roger, handing a new manuscript note-book to May. "Miss Secretary, will you prepare to record the vote about to be passed on Eve unless she withdraws her accusation?" he added, turning to May.

"I shan't," said Eve, promptly; "and what is more, I believe you have changed the balls, and that the red one is in your pocket, for I can see it sticking out."

"Hulloa, Roger, have you been cheating? Let us search him, Harold. Lend a hand," said Gerard, and the next minute the three boys were struggling on the floor.

"Oh, don't, boys, don't fight; I can't bear to see you," said Mary.

"Gerard, please let Roger go," cried May, almost in tears.

"They are not fighting, and they are certainly not hurting Roger. Besides he is stronger than Gerard and Harold put together," said Eve, who, truth to tell, rather enjoyed the scene.

"I have got it," ungrammatically shouted Harold, "here is the red ball."

"I'll pay you out for this, you young sneak," mut-

tered Roger, getting up from the ground and shaking himself.

"That is good, Roger calling Harold a sneak. Why it's a case of the pot and the kettle, only Harold is a nice, clean copper kettle, and Roger a very black old saucepan," cried Eve.

"Don't joke, Eve, it is a very serious matter. I am afraid we shall have to call Father in to settle it," said Gerard.

"I am not joking. I agree with you, Gerard, and I vote we send for St. John Wood at once and refer the whole matter to him," said Eve.

"I vote we have a new president. The club will never get on if the president cheats," said Harold.

"What are you crying for, May? Don't be a little idiot," growled Roger; "there is nothing to cry for."

"Oh, Roger, I am so sorry; and Eve, dear Eve, please don't let them send for Uncle Charlie. You won't, will you?" sobbed May.

"No, I won't, May, so don't cry any more. Roger is not worth crying for," said Eve.

May cried on all the same. Roger is not the only person in the world not worth a few tears, nor May the only one to waste them on an undeserving object. So long as there are men and boys in the world to go wrong, so long there will be sisters and mothers and wives and lovers to weep over them. And who shall say that the tears are all in vain? "Put my

tears into thy bottle. Are not these things noted in thy book?"

"What are we to do, Gerard? You are the next eldest," said Harold.

"Send for father, I think," said Gerard.

"No, we won't, because it will punish May more than it will Roger," said Eve; "and it is he that ought to suffer, not May."

"Can't we forgive him?" asked Mary.

All this time Roger had been leaning on the window-sill, looking sulkily out of the window into the back-garden, which appeared to interest him exceedingly, though beyond a water-tub and a couple of cats on the wall, there was little else to gaze at. He had tried to cheat St. John Wood out of a place on the committee, and he had done it so clumsily that he had been found out, and now he was in a pretty fix. If they sent for Mr. Sandys, he would probably be punished; moreover it would only rouse his suspicions, and perhaps lead him to ask Wood if he knew any reason why Roger should wish to exclude him from the club, and this was the very thing of all things Roger wished to avoid. On the other hand, if they sent to St. John Wood as they seemed inclined to do and told him the story, he would know why Roger wished to avoid him, would ask for his money, and, as he certainly would not get it, would go to Mr. Sandys about it. Either of these alternatives was equally bad in Roger's opinion, and he soon decided

to choose neither, but to try and brave the matter out.

"What a fuss you all make about nothing," he exclaimed, turning round and facing them; "I was only having a little fun."

"Fun indeed! Where is the fun in cheating?" asked Eve indignantly.

"It is more than fun, Roger, when it comes to this," said Gerard.

"Well, to prove to you that it is only fun, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll resign my post, and you may ask Wood to take it, and when he has it I hope he'll like it, for a more miserable set of whining creatures I never met."

"Don't add insult to injury, Roger, please," said Eve.

"It is all because you would have girls in it. I knew we should have no peace, if we admitted them," said Roger. "Are you going to agree to my proposal? Only mind there is one thing—Wood is to know nothing about my little joke."

"Look here, Roger," said Gerard after a pause, "do you mind going out of the room while we discuss the question? We can't do so before you; besides I believe that is the etiquette when any question of the kind arises in clubs."

"All right, I can go, only be quick about it," said Roger, leaving the room, and banging the door after him.

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When he was gone the committee discussed the matter very seriously, for they felt it was a serious affair, and that if such proceedings were to be winked at, the club must soon fall to the ground, like a house built of toy bricks.

In about a quarter of an hour they arrived at a decision, and they called Roger in to hear it.

CHAPTER IV.

SERIOUS, BUT NOT TO BE SKIPPED.

ROGER looked decidedly small when he entered the room again, especially when he noticed that Gerard was occupying the president's chair.

"Roger," said Gerard, who was supported on the right hand by Eve, "the opinion of this committee is that you have committed a very grave offence, and one that we cannot overlook. May, however, has stuck up for you."

"Which is more than you deserve," interrupted Eve.

"Don't interrupt the vice-president, Eve," said Harold.

"So we have decided, on certain conditions, not to expel you, as was first suggested, nor to tell my father, nor indeed to mention the matter to any one:" continued Gerard.

Roger began to breathe more freely, and secretly he congratulated himself on the favourable turn matters seemed to have taken, when Eve burst in with another remark.

"If we did mention it, the 'Little Bricks' would

come to grief. No one would care to belong to a club where the president cheated at the first meeting."

"Eve," said Gerard, "I call you to order."

"Gerard," returned Eve, "I order you to call me Miss Marshall when you address me officially."

"Miss Marshall, then, unless you can be quiet I must resign my office of vice-president," said Gerard.

"May I ask what the conditions are, or am I to wait till Eve is quiet, because, if so, I shall never know them?" said Roger.

"The conditions are, that you resign your office of president to St. John Wood. We shan't tell him anything about it; in fact, he never need know that you have been president. Do you agree to this?" asked Gerard.

"Yes, I agree," said Roger, swallowing the pill as best he might, unaware that there was a still bitterer one of Miss Eve's prescribing to follow. "The other condition is that you apologise to this committee for your conduct this afternoon."

On hearing this, Roger's first inclination was utterly to refuse to do anything of the kind; but when he reflected what serious consequences such a refusal would involve, he changed his mind and, turning to the committee, he muttered sulkily, "I apologise," and walked out of the room.

The meeting broke up shortly after, Gerard and Harold going at once to see Wood, and lay the official request to assume the presidency of the club

of "Little Bricks," which May had written, before him.

Meanwhile Roger went to his aunt, Mrs. Sandys, to receive his pocket-money for the week.

"I wish you would ask father to increase my allowance, Aunt Minnie," said Roger as he pocketed his half-crown.

"I am sure it would be useless, dear; besides, half-a-crown a week is enough for you to spend; you have nothing to buy with it. Is there anything you want? because if so, you have only to tell me, you know; and if it is reasonable you shall have it directly," said Mrs. Sandys.

"No; what I want is money, Aunt Minnie. Would you mind advancing me five shillings?"

"Tell me what you want it for, Roger, before I agree to that," answered Mrs. Sandys.

"It's—it's for charity," stammered Roger, salving his conscience with the thought that three shillings of it must go to the "Little Bricks."

"Roger, are you quite sure? Do you really want this money for some good purpose?" asked Mrs. Sandys.

"Yes, I do," said Roger, thinking that paying his debts was certainly a good purpose.

"Then I will do it this once, but mind I can't do it again, so don't ask me;" and Roger knew it would be useless ever to do so, for gentle as Mrs. Sandys looked and was, you might as well have tried to

turn the sun from its course as to attempt to make her alter a decision she felt to be right.

So Roger took his money—seven shillings and sixpence—and went his way, intending to give St. John five shillings on account of his debt, and to keep the other half-crown for his subscription to the “Little Bricks.” He went first to Wood’s house, but seeing Gerard and Harold on the door-step, he turned away, for he could not transact his business with St. John in their presence. He would go for a stroll, and then, having made sure that his cousins had left, he would return and pay the five shillings, which perhaps would keep St. John quiet for another three months, during which time Roger might get a tip from some generous friend or relation; at any rate the evil day of reckoning would be postponed. On his stroll Roger fell in with a friend, one Tom Price, with whom Mr. Sandys had forbidden Harold to have anything to do, as he was known to be one of the worst boys in the school, for he went to the same school as Roger and Harold. Roger knew well enough this prohibition extended to him, though he chose to ignore it, but he carried on his intimacy with Price “under the rose.”

It began about a year before the “Little Bricks” was started, and with it began Roger’s troubles, for it was the beginning of his wrong-doings, and, oh, if we could only get this thought well into our minds, sin is at the bottom of all the misery the

world has ever known. There may be suffering, perhaps terrible suffering, God only knows how terrible, in store for us after we have turned our faces away from sin and turned them towards God, so that by looking constantly on Him, we may grow more like Him. But there is no misery equal to that which our sin brings upon us when we are still separated from Him. It is a foretaste of hell, for what else is hell but separation from God, from the Lord Jesus Christ? To be with Him is heaven to those who love Him; to be apart from Him for ever is misery such as our finite minds can hardly bear to contemplate.

Ah, no; there are two kinds of suffering in this world of pain and grief, not that it is all pain by any means by the way, though the older we grow the more we see of it—there is the suffering without God and the suffering with Him, and they differ as much as a dark starless night does from a beautiful moonlight one.

Roger did not know God. He had been taught to say his prayers night and morning, to learn the Collect once a week, to go to church every Sunday and to say his catechism, he could even read his Testament in the original Greek, but God was as utter a stranger to him as the Queen or Prince Bismarck. And now Roger was beginning to suffer; his sin was already finding him out; his deceit was netting his feet, and he could no longer walk up-

right. As yet he was only a child, and his troubles were in proportion to his years; but as he grows older it will not be so. The furnace will be heated hotter as he grows stronger and more able to bear it, until, at the last, it will be like the fiery furnace in which the three holy children walked of old—like it, indeed, if with him, as with them, there walketh One whose form is like that of the Son of God; but if he tread that furnace alone, well for him if he escape at all—certain is it he will not escape uninjured.

The fact was Price had led Roger into playing cards for money, to such an extent that he could not resist the temptation, and all his money went in this way. Sometimes he won, and then he was so elated that he went on playing; but on the whole he lost much more than he won, for neither Mr. Price nor his friends were very honourable, and they frequently cheated poor Roger.

It was perfectly true that he had lost his Lexicon, and he really intended to buy a new one with the money Wood had lent him, but unfortunately Price got hold of him the same day and fleeced him of five shillings. He could not get a lexicon for less than two pounds, so instead of bravely telling Wood or Mr. Sandys how foolish he had been, he tried to win it back the next day, and so he had gone on playing, occasionally winning a little one day to lose double or treble the sum the next, until the two

pounds soon vanished, and with it went most of Roger's pocket-money.

This afternoon Price asked him to come and have a game, knowing it was pay-day, and Roger, though he at first declined, soon yielded to the temptation. He was a weak boy, with no stamina, no moral backbone, and he was placed in great temptation; so do not judge him too harshly, for remember we none of us know our strength or our weakness until we are tempted.

Temptation is like a great river with very strong currents, in which only those who can swim well and are strong can be saved: to those who stand on the bank and do not feel the force of the waves, it may look easy enough to cross it, but unless they have tried it themselves they are unable to judge of the danger. Roger was weak, and he went with his seven-and-sixpence in his pocket, and he came away with four shillings, having lost the rest. He was very low-spirited at his losses, and left Price's in a very bad temper. Two things he at once decided to do, to pay Wood the four shillings at once before he lost it, as he inevitably would the next time Price came in his way, and to leave the "Little Bricks." This last resolution cost Roger a good deal. He was not altogether a bad boy; he would have liked to have helped in building this room; moreover, he wanted to get away from Price if he could, and he thought, by giving nearly half his allowance to the

club, to charity as he said, he was beginning to wean himself from cards and Price. Now he must resign, simply because he had no money to pay his subscription, and he felt he was cutting himself off from his cousins and all his best friends. There would soon be a gulf between them, which he feared, perhaps truly, would grow wider every day. Still he must do it, and he made up his mind to send in his resignation that evening. The others would think it was because Wood was chosen in his place. Let them think so. Perhaps it was as well they should. There was less chance of their arriving at the real reason.

Wood was at home and alone, the second time that Roger sought him. He was a handsome boy of sixteen, fair, with short curly hair, blue eyes, and small features; rather small for his age, but with a manner that amply atoned for what he lacked in stature.

"Oh, it is you, Sandys, is it? I thought you had cut me. You have not been near me this term," he said.

"We have not been back a fortnight," said Roger evasively. "How did you like your holidays?"

"Splendid fun down in Devonshire. Cricket-matches two or three times a week, plenty of fishing, and a gun whenever I liked to go out. The old girl did it in style," said St. John.

"The old girl," we regret to say, was a maiden aunt

with whom Mr. Wood had been spending part of his holidays.

“Did she tip you?”

“Rather! I was very lucky this time. I called on my uncle, the Right Honourable, on my way home, and he came down rather handsomely.”

“How long did you stay with him?”

“Only ten minutes, thank you. The trains did not fit in, besides that is long enough for the Right Honourable; a little of him goes a long way. He is rather overpowering. However, it paid. He gave me a five-pound note; ten shillings a minute was not bad, was it?”

“No, I wish I had an uncle a Right Honourable. By the way, St. John, I came to pay you some of that money I owe you. Here is four shillings,” said Roger, tendering it as he spoke.

“Why, I thought you were to pay me twelve at the end of the quarter.”

“So I was, but as you are so well off can’t you wait, St. John? Besides, on my honour, I have not another penny to give you,” said Roger.

“Look here, youngster. It is not for myself I care, so much as for you. I may not want the money, but I want you to pay me for your own sake, and what is more I mean you to pay me; so now I warn you, if you don’t pay me at Christmas—the shilling a week from last August till then, I mean—I go to old Sandys as sure as I am St. John Wood. You are

getting into mischief, I am afraid, and it would be a deal better for you if you would tell me what it is, instead of giving me the cold shoulder as you have done lately. I'll stand by you if you do. I promised to look after you to the Colonel, and I'll keep my promise. What is up?"

For a minute Roger was tempted to make a clean breast of it, but he could not make up his mind to do so. He hesitated, and then he muttered something about not wanting to give St. John the cold shoulder, and shortly after took his departure. Wood had meant to have discussed the club with him, for he was full of it, but Roger did not give him the opportunity.

On Monday morning a letter addressed to the committee of the "Little Bricks," in Roger's handwriting, was laid on May's plate at breakfast. The boys were anxious that she, as secretary, should open it, but this May declined to do, wishing it to be kept, with all the other letters to the club, till the committee meeting on the following Saturday, when they could be opened by the president and discussed; which suggestion was finally agreed to, much to the indignation of Eve, whose fingers tingled to break the seals.

The members of the committee were rather excited when they met on Saturday, for the first time with St. John at their head; and as they all stood more in awe of him than of Roger, it seemed likely

to be a quiet meeting, for even Eve was more subdued than usual.

“Where is Roger?” was one of the first questions asked, and as no one seemed able to give a satisfactory answer, May suggested his letter should be opened, and the new president acted at once upon the hint.

“I suppose I had better read it aloud,” said St. John, and suiting the action to the word, he read as follows:—“Mr. Roger Sandys regrets that he is unable to continue a member of the club of ‘Little Bricks,’ and therefore begs that his name may be removed at once from the committee.”

This letter caused no little commotion among the members; they were all taken aback by this unexpected move, and the general feeling was one of annoyance and vexation, not so much at losing Roger, as because the club could not well bear to lose even him in its infancy. They began to feel there were difficulties in their way, and that it would by no means be all plain sailing, and consequently they felt cast down.

Eve was the first to speak after the bomb had burst. “We shall never succeed if this is the style we are going on in,” she said, knitting her pretty eyebrows.

“Horribly shabby of Roger, I call it,” said Harold.

“I do hope no one else will get tired of it,” said Mary.

"Roger is not tired of it, and he takes a great interest in it, I know," said May, "because he told me to tell him all that passed at the meeting to-day, and he said if there were any letters to write he would help me."

"Oh, then, you knew he had resigned, May! Why did he do it?" asked Gerard.

"No, I didn't," said May; "I only knew he was not coming to the meeting to-day. I don't know why either, but I think it is because he can't afford to pay his subscription."

May had excellent private reasons of her own for hazarding this conjecture, for Roger frequently borrowed of her, though, to do him justice, he always paid her before any one else.

"It can't be that, May; his allowance is the same as mine—he can afford it as well or better than any of us," said Gerard.

"At any rate," said St. John Wood, "there is no reason for you all to look so doleful though Roger has forsaken us. If you think we are to have no obstacles to overcome, you are all very much mistaken; and if you are going to be disheartened at every little *contrtemps*, we had better smash up the 'Little Bricks' at once."

"No, no, no," interrupted the committee.

"Very well then, take a more cheerful view of things. Rome was not built in a day, as no doubt you have heard before, and our room won't be

either. To tell you the truth, I rather enjoy having some difficulties to overcome. I don't care to sail always with a fair wind in a calm sea; a gale now and then freshens one up, not to mention the delight of having weathered a storm when you get to the end of your voyage. I don't believe there ever was a ship-wrecked sailor yet, who got safe into port in the end, who would sell his experience for all the wealth of the Indies. I mean that if the choice had been offered him, he would have chosen the storm, unless he was a muff. If we succeed in the end—and I mean we shall—all the more glory to us if we have had difficulties to contend with. Life would not be worth living if we had nothing to do but lie on our backs, and let everything we wished for drop into our mouths. That would be a game I for one should not care to play at. And now for the rest of these letters;" and the new president proceeded to open a batch of letters. They were all answers to the letters May had sent, inviting certain of their friends to become "Little Bricks," and they turned out all to be acceptances, a fact which again brought St. John to his legs.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasant duty to announce to you that fourteen of our friends have consented to become 'Little Bricks,' and have agreed to pay one shilling weekly to the fund for the building of the mission-room. I may add that nearly all have expressed their pleasure in being

able to do anything for Mr. Sandys, a sentiment in which we all join, I am sure, and one which I believe I am right in saying has been the chief motive in the formation of this club."

Here St. John paused, for Mary Marshall coloured up and looked as if she had something to say. Apparently, however, her courage failed her, for she said nothing, and shortly after the meeting broke up.

Eve had noticed Mary's manner as well as St. John, and with her usual curiosity, she inquired into it when they were alone.

"Mary, what made you blush so when St. John said we were all going to build the mission-room to please Mr. Sandys?"

"Because, Eve, I don't think we ought to do it for that reason only; we ought to do it to please God, not to please Mr. Sandys," said Mary in a low voice.

"But we are not all saints like you, Mary."

"Don't, Eve; I am not a saint at all. I am a miserable coward—I ought to have said that at the meeting, and I dare not."

"I am not so sure of that, Polly. It seems to me you will get on better if you keep those kind of things to yourself; the others might have called it cant."

"It is not cant, Eve; I do mean it. I want to help to build that room, because I know our Lord will like it, and you know the hymn says:

'We must trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.'

"I know you mean it, Polly, but I don't suppose any of the others have thought of such a thing, unless it is Gerard. I have not, and what is more, I don't mean to. I am going to do it to please Mr. Sandys, who, I think, is the dearest man in the world, and I only wish he would come to the committee meetings oftener. I declare I shall do something wicked to bring him; I will touch that table of his."

"Eve, you never could be so naughty. He would turn us all out of the room; besides, if you care for him, why do you want to vex him?"

"Oh, Polly, what a queer girl you are! Don't you understand I would rather be scolded by Mr. Sandys than praised by any one else? I must do something to bring him to the next meeting; it will be so slow if we are always going to be as quiet as we were to-day."

Mary was so much distressed at this, that Eve at last promised to do nothing outrageous for the present; above all, not to touch the forbidden table. For the next fortnight the club went on very quietly. The subscriptions were regularly paid, and the committee meetings were most amicable. This calm afterwards proved to be treacherous—it was only the calm before the storm that Eve, from pure love of mischief, was endeavouring to create, and which was destined before long to break out in all its fury.

CHAPTER V.

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

MAY was quite right in saying Roger still took a great interest in the "Little Bricks," though no longer one of them. He did, and he always made May give him an account of the meetings, though he never vouchsafed to tell her why he had left the club. Once May ventured to ask him, and was told that "little girls should not ask questions," after which rebuke she maintained a discreet silence on the subject, for she could not bear to vex Roger, whom she loved passionately.

Roger was by no means insensible to this love; indeed, one of the redeeming points in his character was his affection for his little sister, though he was by no means demonstrative. On the contrary, he was often dictatorial and even harsh to her himself, but if any one else was unkind to her, Roger always took her part.

Through May, Roger learnt that there was an insurrection in the camp, planned, it need hardly be said, by Eve, which was to break out into open rebellion at the next meeting. It happened that there

had not been much business at the last committee-meeting, and there had been a great deal of talking, so St. John had passed a rule that there was to be no whispering during meetings, nor conversation on irrelevant subjects. This rule Eve made the basis of her rebellion, and she had done her best to get Harold and May to join her in resisting it; it would have been useless to try to corrupt Mary or Gerard, so Eve let them alone and confined her operations to the other two. Harold was very easily persuaded to join in what he called a lark, and quite agreed that St. John was taking too much upon himself. May of course referred the matter to Roger, who having a spite against the new president, urged her to obey Eve's counsels, which were to whisper and talk on whatever subjects they pleased at the next meeting and utterly to ignore the authority of the chair.

St. John, Gerard, and Mary were blissfully unconscious that anything unusual was about to happen when they met on the following Saturday. The three conspirators occupied one side of the table, and no sooner had the president begun to address the meeting, than Eve and May began to chatter vigorously, Harold whistling an accompaniment.

"This club having now been in existence for one month, and the subscriptions having reached four pounds, I have to propose—" began St. John.

"That there be no more whispering," interrupted Gerard; "I can't hear what you are saying."

"Ladies and gentlemen:—Allow me to remind you that at our last meeting," began St. John, but he was interrupted by Eve, who leant across May to ask Harold who was the best cricketer in the school now.

"Don't know; Wood, I think," said Harold.

"Ladies and gentlemen," again began the president, knocking on the table to enforce his remarks, "it will be my painful duty to name you for disregarding the authority of the chair."

The trio paid not the slightest attention to this warning, but talked louder than before.

"Miss Marshall, Miss Sandys, and Sandys minor, I call you to order, and unless you are quiet directly I shall direct the secretary to record a vote of censure against you," said St. John.

"You can direct; no one will pay any attention," said Eve.

"What do you mean, Eve?" asked St. John. "I desire that a vote of censure be at once recorded against you. May, will you enter it?"

"No, I won't," said May.

"Bravo, May! Don't you be sat upon; we'll back you up," said Harold.

"You be quiet, Harold, or I'll punch your head for you," said St. John, losing his temper.

"No, you won't," said Eve; "at least you'll have to punch mine first, if you do."

"Eve, do be quiet, and let St. John speak," urged Mary.

"I was about to say that the subscriptions having now reached four pounds," again began the president, thinking it better to pass over the interruption, but the chattering grew louder than ever, and he was obliged to raise his voice to be heard at all.

"Hand me the minute-book, will you, Gerard?" he shouted, and Gerard having reached it, St. John began to record votes of censure against the three rebels, who paid not the least heed, but laughed and talked louder than ever.

"I tell you what it is, Eve, May, and Harold, if you don't shut up directly, I'll go and fetch Mr. Sandys. I won't stand this sort of thing, I can tell you. What do you mean by it?" said St. John, throwing down his pen.

"We mean to have none of your rules about not talking during the meetings," said Harold.

"We mean to talk as much as we like," said Eve.

"And we don't mean to be domineered over," said May.

"No one is domineering," said Mary.

"You shan't talk as much as you like," said Gerard.

"And you shall obey the rules," said St. John.

This was only the beginning. Then they all went it, hammer and tongs: the rebels called the others "stuck-up donkeys:" these last replied that the others were "rude, ill-behaved young monkeys," till, as St. John remarked, "compliments flew fast," and the noise became deafening. All lost their tempers

except Mary, who took no part in the row except to side with Gerard and St. John when appealed to, and what might have happened if they had not been interrupted, we cannot say. In the midst of the tumult the door opened, and in walked Mr. Sandys, who had overheard the row from his study, which was at the back of the house, and came to see what was wrong.

There was a sudden lull when he appeared, but he saw by the flushed faces and flashing eyes before him, that something more than mere fun was going on, and he asked gravely what was the matter.

A torrent of answers greeted him. All began to speak at once, till he could make nothing out of it.

"Silence!" he exclaimed sternly, in a voice that not even Eve cared to disobey. "I am ashamed of you all."

There was a dead silence for about a minute, though it seemed much longer to the delinquents, who began to feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves, which was probably the feeling Mr. Sandys desired to kindle.

"Now, St. John, you tell me what all this is about," he said, when he thought this exceedingly disagreeable silence, which was far more impressive than any words would have been, had lasted long enough.

"Eve is at the bottom of it all, sir; she has led the others, May and Harold, on—" began St. John.

"I did not ask you to accuse any one. I simply want to know in as few words as possible, what all this quarrelling is about," interrupted Mr. Sandys.

"I made a rule at the last meeting that there was to be no whispering during the meetings, nor any talking on other subjects than the business of the club. Eve does not like the rule, and those three have been laughing and talking till it is impossible to do anything; and when I call them to order, they only cheek me," said Wood.

"What have you to say to this, Eve?" said Mr. Sandys, turning to Eve.

"I hate rules," said Eve. "I always break them if I can, and I thought the president was taking too much upon himself. It is all my fault, Mr. Sandys. I led May and Harold on, as St. John says."

"I can quite believe it," said Mr. Sandys, drawing Eve close to him. "Listen to me, Eve. If you can't keep the rules, you can't belong to the club, for there must be some rules—as few as possible, I advise—but those few must be kept, and I think you are going to keep them in future, aren't you?" he continued, turning Eve's beautiful face round to see if there were any signs of contrition on it.

"Yes, I will to please you," said Eve, frankly.

Mr. Sandys said no more to her, but Eve knew by his eyes and the gentle pressure of her hand that he was satisfied.

"Well, now, to prevent any more quarrelling to-day, I wish the girls to speak French for the rest of the afternoon. Do you hear?" he continued, turning to the others.

"We shan't understand a word if they do, father," objected Harold.

"I can't help that, Harold."

"The meeting will be stopped," said Gerard.

"So it was practically by quarrelling," said Mr. Sandys. "At any rate it must be done. Remember the girls are not to speak a word of English for the rest of the afternoon," and with this he left them.

"A nice mess you have led us into, Miss Eve. How are we to discuss anything when you can't speak English?" said St. John.

"Ce n'est pas ma faute; c'est la vôtre, vous devez parler Français," said Eve.

"What are you talking about? I don't understand. I tell you I can't parler Français."

"Et moi, je dis que vous le devez," said Eve.

"Do you know what she says, Gerard?" asked St. John.

"No, I dare say she is cheeking you."

"Non, je ne suis pas," said Eve.

"Do you understand, May and Mary?" asked Harold.

"Oui, nous comprenons, mais il ne faut pas que nous—" began May.

"Oh, stop that gibberish, pray," said Gerard, "we can't make head or tail of it."

"Vous êtes bête donc," said Eve, nodding her head at Gerard.

"Bête et stupide," put in May.

"Look here, Gerard, I won't stand this. I believe these girls are slanging us right and left. I will wash my hands of the whole thing if they don't take care. I will resign," said the president.

"Oh, don't, please, don't," said May, clasping her hands together, and speaking in English in her excitement.

"Hulloa! May, you have disobeyed father. You have spoken English. You will catch it," said Harold.

"No, you won't, May, but you will have to go and tell him you forgot, when the meeting is over," said Gerard.

"Oh, je n'ose pas, je n'ose pas," cried May, in an agony of fear at the prospect before her.

"What does she say?" demanded St. John.

"Elle dit qu'elle n'ose pas," said Eve, speaking very slowly and emphasising each word, apparently under the impression that this must enable the boys to understand.

"I don't know what you say, nor do I know what May is crying for. What is the matter, May?" said St. John.

"I suppose she is afraid father will be angry. He won't mind a bit, May, if you tell him how it happened," said Gerard.

"Voulez-vous venir avec moi, Gerard?" asked May through her tears.

"I don't know; I can't understand," said Gerard, at which May's tears fell faster; and Eve tried to

console her in French, but not very successfully, perhaps because her knowledge of the language was limited.

"Let us finish our business and end this meeting as quickly as we can, for what with the row, and this talking French, and May's crying, we are having a lively time of it. Do you all agree ?" said the president.

"Oui," said the girls.

"Come, I do understand that ; perhaps we shall get on now, we have arrived at one word we all know the meaning of," said St. John, hopefully. "I propose that we adjourn till Wednesday afternoon ; you girls can speak English then, and we can discuss the money question, which I was going to bring before you, at the beginning of the afternoon. Does that suit everybody ?"

"Non, je ne puis pas venir, ni Mary non plus," said Eve.

"Here is a go ! I don't understand a word except 'non.' What does the girl mean ?" said St. John. "Why can't you come, Eve, for, I suppose, 'non' means 'you can't ?'"

But Eve's French did not enable her to explain that it was because Miss Helder was going to take her and Mary to the South Kensington Museum, not that it would have availed her anything, if she could have told them why, seeing that none of the boys could have understood her.

"C'est impossible ; nous ne pouvons pas venir," was all the president could get out of her.

"It strikes me we are in pretty much in the same fix the Jews were at the Tower of Babel," said Harold.

"There is certainly a confusion of tongues, and as long as that lasts the mission-room is not likely to get built," said Gerard.

"It would not be a bad comparison, but for one rather important fact, there were no Jews in the Tower-of-Babel days; however, we are uncommonly like the builders of it, and under these very disadvantageous circumstances I vote that the meeting break up; we can fix another day for the next meeting to-morrow; I will call in on purpose in the afternoon at the Marshalls, and you three can drop in accidentally on purpose at the same time, say four o'clock; now, you girls, you have nothing to do but say 'oui' to that; and whether you say it or not, I shall take it for granted; so good-bye, and look here, Eve, if you wish this club to be a success, don't let us have any more of your humbug in future." With which parting injunction St. John vacated the chair, and the members left the committee-room slowly and sadly.

Eve was not very happy, her plot had been too successful by far, and she almost wished she had let it alone; she had done no good; on the contrary, she had only hindered the work in which she really

felt a very great interest. Mary was sorry Eve had been so mischievous, and was revolving in her own mind various plans for the reformation of her sister : an object very dear to her heart ; and though Mary was only a little girl of twelve, she finally hit upon the very best way to accomplish it ; she determined to pray for her. Unconsciously she was helping Eve very much by her example, and by never turning away from her, or appearing shocked when her sister fell into any disgrace. However naughty Eve was, and she was exceedingly naughty sometimes, Mary was always gentle and loving to her, though often far more sorry for the offence than the culprit herself.

Eve noticed all this, and it had its effect: it made her wonder at the difference between Mary and herself, and convinced her the difference was very deep down in their hearts, though she only explained it to herself by thinking that Mary was good, and she was not.

The sisters left May in the hall, where Roger met her, most anxious to hear the result of the meeting.

“ Come in here, May, and tell me all about it ? ”

“ Je ne puis pas, Roger; il faut que je parle Français; mon oncle l'a dit,” said May, shrinking away.

Roger understood French though he could not speak it, so he answered—

“ What on earth do you mean by being obliged to speak French ? Tell me about the meeting.”

"Oh, Harold, venez ici et expliquez à Roger, s'il vous plait," cried May, as Roger seized her roughly.

"Nonsense; I don't want Harold. I want you to tell me all about it. Tell me in English at once."

"She must not speak English, Roger. Father ordered all the girls to speak French till the evening," explained Harold.

"Rubbish! Here, May, come in and tell me. It is evening now, so begin at once; besides, if it were not, Uncle Charlie would never know. Now, then, let's hear"—and Roger seated himself opposite May to listen.

"Roger, je ne puis pas vous dire à présent. Après le thé je vous dirai tout."

"That won't do, I want to hear it now. Don't be so obstinate, May, and so disagreeable. I shall be very angry with you directly," said Roger, at which threat May burst into tears.

"You baby, crying for nothing. You are just like all girls, and I thought you were different. What a hypocrite you are, May, pretending to be so fond of me, and yet you won't do a little thing like this to please me; it is very mean and unkind of you. I don't believe you care a bit for me."

"I do, I do, Roger," sobbed May.

"Then why don't you tell me?"

"Because Uncle Charlie will be angry with me if I speak English," said May.

"Why, you are speaking English now. May, you are a hypocrite."

"Oh, j'oubliai," said May.

"Forgot indeed! Anyhow you can tell me now, 'You may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb,' as the saying runs, so now let us have it."

May hesitated. She was dreadfully afraid of offending Roger; on the other hand, her conscience told her to speak English now would be a deliberate act of disobedience to her uncle, a much more serious offence than forgetting the prohibition.

"Non, Roger, je ne puis pas. Gerard a dit qu'il faut que je confesse à mon oncle que j'oubliais," said May at last.

"Now, look here, May. Are you going to tell me or not? Gerard can mind his own business, and you just say nothing about it to Uncle Charlie. If you don't tell me, I'll send you to Coventry for a week."

This was such a terrible threat, and May knew Roger would act upon it, that she yielded to the temptation, and gave him a graphic description of the row in English, at the end of which Roger extorted a promise that she would say nothing to Mr. Sandys about having disobeyed him. May went away feeling very miserable, and in the hall she met her uncle, at whose appearance she started and looked so guilty, that he at once suspected something was wrong.

"Where do you come from, May?" he asked.

"From the school-room," said May, trembling.

"What have you been doing there?"

"Talking to Roger," answered May.

"In French or in English?"

May hesitated, and Mr. Sandys repeated his question, taking May's face in his hands as he did so, and looking full into it, so that she dare not tell a story, had she meant to do so.

"In English," whispered May, shaking like a leaf.

"How was that?" asked Mr. Sandys gravely.

May's answer was to burst out crying.

"Poor little girl," said her uncle kindly, "come into my study and tell me all about it."

The poor little girl felt very much as the fly did when the spider asked her to walk into his parlour; however, she had no choice but to obey, so in fear and trembling May went into the study, to her always a dreadful room, but under the present circumstances more terrible than ever.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLUB GIVES A DINNER.

MR. SANDYS' study was a remarkably comfortable room, nothing alarming about it, except in May's imagination, and her fears were by no means dispelled when her uncle seated himself in his easy-chair and placed her in front of him.

"Now, May, don't be frightened, but leave off crying and tell me how you came to disobey me. What do you suppose I am going to do to you? The worst would be to make you speak French for a week, and I am not even sure that you deserve that."

May began to feel a little reassured, and she whispered timidly;

"At first I forgot at the meeting."

"Then there was nothing wrong in that. And afterwards, when you were with Roger, you did not forget."

"Yes I did, part of the time."

"And the rest of the time you did it wilfully, do you mean?"

"Yes," sobbed Mary, "but I did not want to."

Mr. Sandys gave a shrewd guess at the truth after this last remark, though it was by no means clear.

"Roger made you do it, I suspect. Was that it?" he asked.

"I can't tell you," said May.

"Yes, you can, May, and you must. I won't punish Roger, or, indeed, mention the subject to him, I promise you; but I must know what made you speak English."

"It was because Roger wanted to hear about the meeting, and he would have been so angry if I had not told him, and I couldn't in French," said May, her spirits rising as she made this confession, for she loved her uncle so dearly that it went to her heart to offend him, and she was delighted at being able to exculpate herself without injuring her brother.

"Do you think you did right or wrong in trying to please Roger?" asked Mr. Sandys.

"Wrong," said May.

"Yes, I am afraid it was; but, May, we won't say any more about it this time, only another time do what you feel to be right, no matter what the consequences may be; and never let the fear of offending Roger, or any one else, lead you to offend God or those set over you by Him. You know God reveals His will to children through their parents, or those who stand to them in the place of parents as I do to you now, and that is the reason why dis-

obedience to parents or to any one set over us is so great a sin, it is disobedience to God as well. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said May.

"Then give me a kiss, and run away to tea; I have my sermon to finish for to-morrow, which you 'Little Bricks' have interrupted once before this afternoon. You can speak English now." And May ran away with a lightened conscience, and feeling very happy. The only cloud on her happiness was a fear lest Roger should ask any questions about her interview with Mr. Sandys; but this soon disappeared, for Roger was unusually kind to his sister all that evening, and made no allusion to what had passed in the afternoon.

That night he came to May's room after she had gone up to bed for a talk as he said, the object of which was very soon apparent.

"May, what do you do with your pocket-money?" was Roger's opening question.

"I give a shilling a week to the 'Little Bricks,' and then I have to buy my gloves out of the other shilling, but I don't use it all for that. I want money for presents sometimes."

"You can always get it from Aunt Minnie for that, though. Could you lend me your other shilling a week for two months, do you think? I will pay you back some day, the very next tip I get, and I am certain to have some at Christmas, if not before.

The truth is, May, I am awfully hard up, and I want it very badly."

"I will if I can, Roger; but Aunt Minnie will notice my gloves are shabby if I don't get some new ones soon, and then she will want to know what I have done with my money."

"You must not tell her if you lend it to me, promise me that, May, or I won't take it," said Roger, as if he were conferring a favour by borrowing it.

"Oh, no, Roger, I won't tell her; I'll give you the shilling every Saturday when I pay my club subscription."

"All right, May, you are a jolly little girl," and with this Roger kissed his sister, much to her surprise and delight, for it was a very unusual proceeding with him. Roger's object in borrowing this money, he persuaded himself, was to pay St. John, but as none of his own half-crown went to this purpose, it was a toss-up whether May's would.

The "Little Bricks" met as they had arranged on Sunday afternoon at the Marshalls', where it was settled that all the business should be postponed to the following Saturday afternoon, and it was agreed there should be no more quarrelling to delay the proceedings.

"It seems to me we have had nothing but disagreeables ever since this club was started," said Gerard.

"Suppose we vary the thing by having something agreeable ; let us give a dinner," said St. John.

"Bravo ! St. John, that is the best idea you have started yet ; we won't let that drop," said Harold.

"And I tell you what, we will cook it ourselves," said Eve.

"No, thank you, Eve, we want a dinner we can eat if we do have one," said Harold.

"Oh, yes, we will do the thing in style ; we will ask some people to dine with us, Mr. and Mrs. Sandys to begin with," said St. John.

"And Dr. and Mrs. Marshall," said Gerard.

"And, Gerard, please ask Roger, will you ? He would so like to come, I know, and I shall not enjoy it without him," said May.

"Oh, yes, let us have Roger. He looks very miserable now since he left the club," said Harold.

"Of course we will have Roger. That will make eleven, and that is enough," said St. John.

"You won't have eleven unless you let us cook the dinner. That will be half of the fun, and what is more, Mary and I won't join if you don't let us, and May shan't either," said Eve.

"First of all, let us decide where the dinner is to come from. Who is to pay for it ?" asked Gerard.

"The club of course," said Harold, "out of the funds."

"That won't do at all, Harold. The club money must not be touched ; that is all to be paid in next

Saturday, at least I am going to propose it," said St. John.

"How much will it cost?" asked Harold, rattling some money in his pocket.

"I can tell you what it costs mother to give a dinner-party, because I heard her say the other day; it costs five pounds for ten people," said Eve.

"Yes, but we can't give a swell dinner like that, Eve. I vote we ask Mrs. Sandys or Mrs. Marshall to write us out a list of dishes and tell us how much it will cost," said St. John.

"That won't do at all, when they are coming to the party," said Gerard.

"Of course not; it must be a secret," cried May.

"What is this must be a secret? Who are you conspiring against, pray?" exclaimed Dr. Marshall, bursting in upon the party.

"Oh, papa, we want you. Come in. Will you dine with us at our club? we're going to have a dinner," exclaimed Eve.

"I am afraid I can't, my pet; I am so fearfully busy," answered Dr. Marshall.

"Well, I am rather glad you can't, because now you can help us. You see we want to give a dinner, and have you and mamma and Mr. and Mrs. Sandys, and we have no money to give it with," cried Eve.

"That is decidedly an objection to the project, and pray, am I to pay for this entertainment?" asked Dr. Marshall.

"It won't cost much, because we are going to cook the things ourselves, so we can't have very much. It will be cheap," said Eve.

"And nasty," remarked Dr. Marshall, but seeing Eve look rather downcast, he added hastily ; "but if you won't spend more than a pound, you may get what you like of the tradespeople ; or stay, here is a sovereign. There now, do what you will, only don't ask me to eat the dinner," and Dr. Marshall left the room amid cheers for his generosity.

This smoothed the way for the dinner, and the date was fixed for the following Saturday week, which would give them a fortnight to consider the matter thoroughly and prepare the feast. May was requested to send out the invitations in the course of the week, and on the next Saturday committee-meeting the *menu* was to be arranged and all details settled; by then they would know how many guests to expect.

When Saturday came the committee were in the best of tempers. The subscriptions from the other "Little Bricks" had been duly sent in to one or other of the committee, all of whom were anxious to get through the real business of the day as soon as possible, in order to discuss the dinner.

At length the serious part was finished. It was decided to hand in to Mr. Sandys the subscriptions, on the last Saturday of every month, beginning on this particular day when there was five pounds in

the cash-box. This settled, Mary, who had been very nervous ever since the meeting began, touched St. John and said she had a suggestion to make.

"Let us have it then, Mary; it is pretty certain to be a sensible one," said St. John.

Thus encouraged, Mary ventured to remark that she thought a sovereign was a deal of money to spend on a dinner, and that she wanted them to spend less and give the remainder to the "Little Bricks" fund for the mission-room.

This idea was met with universal approbation, except by Harold, who was very anxious the dinner should be done in proper style; and this, in his opinion, would leave very little of the sovereign for the fund.

"Now, the question is, what shall we have for dinner?" began the president.

"And the answer is, you must have what we can cook," said Eve.

"We shan't have much then," interrupted Gerard.

"To begin with, we can't have any joint or anything that wants roasting, because we can't roast at this fire, and of course we shall cook in this room; besides there is not enough cooking in a plain joint," said Eve.

"Not sufficient scope for Eve's genius," said St. John.

"We might have a pie, Eve," said May meekly, "if you could make the pastry."

"Of course I can; we will have it, a beefsteak pie," said Eve.

"With plenty of eggs," interposed Harold, "and you must be sure and have some jam tarts, and I should like a plum-pudding or a custard, only I don't believe you girls could make either."

"You will see," said Eve; "you leave the sweets to us; we will manage them."

"How about the fish and soup? We can't begin with a beefsteak pie," said St. John.

"We can't manage soup, I am sure," said Eve decidedly, "and I am afraid we should spoil the fish, whether it were fried or boiled."

"Then why not have some fish that does not want cooking—shrimps, for instance? Father is very fond of shrimps: so am I," said Harold.

"But you never have shrimps at a dinner-party; they are for tea or breakfast. Why not have oysters?" said St. John.

"Let us have both, shrimps at the top and oysters at the bottom of the table, and the same bread-and-butter will do for both," said Eve, whose suggestion met with universal approval.

The *menu* was finally arranged as follows:—

Shrimps. Oysters. Brown Bread and Butter.

Beefsteak Pie. Potatoes and Salad.

Jam Tarts. Custard.

Dessert.

The invitations had been issued and answered.

Dr. and Mrs. Marshall had both declined, and so had Mrs. Sandys, but Roger and Mr. Sandys had expressed great pleasure in accepting, and Roger took a lively interest in the matter, though he forbore from entreating May to reveal more than she felt disposed as to the coming feast.

The dinner was to take place at six o'clock, and Miss Helder had been prevailed upon to give the three girls a holiday in order to enable them to make their preparations, but Eve created such a storm in a teacup, or, to be literal, in a soup tureen, on Friday afternoon, that the holiday was in great danger of being forfeited.

It had been rather a weight on her mind all the week that there was to be no soup for the dinner, and yet she had no idea how to make any, except a vague notion that you boiled some meat and vegetables together in some mysterious way, and the result was soup. On Friday morning, still very anxious about it, Eve made her way to the kitchen, and tried to cajole the cook into making some for them, but her efforts were in vain.

"Haven't you some in the house you could spare us, Cook?" said Eve.

"No, Miss Eve, not a drop, and I have not time to make you any," said Cook, going into the area to an imaginary tradesman, to avoid any more discussion on a subject that was so nearly akin to perquisites.

Eve took the opportunity of glancing into the pantry on her way back to the schoolroom, and spying a large basin full of brown soup in a jelly, she very quietly, Cook being in the area, carried it upstairs with her.

"What is this?" asked Miss Helder in the afternoon, just as the girls had left the schoolroom.

"This" was the soup which Eve had put into her cupboard, intending to leave it there till the next morning. No one being in the room to answer her question, Miss Helder rang the bell, and asked the housemaid if she knew anything about it.

"Oh, ma'am, it is the soup that Cook has been in such a way about all the morning; I have just given Mrs. Marshall notice on account of it."

"But how did it get here?" demanded Miss Helder.

"I expect Miss Eve must have put it there, ma'am, for this dinner to-morrow," suggested the servant; whereupon Miss Eve was sent for, and was so indignant at being deprived of her soup that she was impertinent to Miss Helder, who, in consequence, revoked her promise of a half-holiday. Mary coming into the schoolroom a little later, found Eve, to her great astonishment, in tears. This was so unusual that Mary was sure something very serious had happened, and was almost as much distressed as her sister on hearing the truth, for no holiday practically meant no dinner.

"It is a shame; she shan't stop all our fun. I'll go and tell papa of her," said Eve, angrily.

"But, Eve, why did you touch the soup?"

"Why should not I? It is much more mine than the cook's. Mother did not know there was any in the house, because I asked her."

"Then why is Miss Helder so angry?"

"Because I was angry, and was rude to her."

"Then, Eve, do go and tell her you are sorry, will you?"

"No, I am not sorry; at least I am, in a way, but I am not going to tell Miss Helder so."

"May I then?" said Mary, and receiving permission she went in search of her, and soon returned with the good news, that as Eve was sorry Miss Helder would say no more about it.

The next morning the cooking operations began soon after breakfast, and certainly, if time and labour made good pastry, Eve's would have been excellent, for she spent a good two hours over it, and worked and rolled till her pretty arms ached.

Meanwhile May and Mary cut up the beefsteak, having first beaten it; then while Mary went to fetch jam for the tarts, Eve took upon herself to order May to break the eggs and put them raw into the pie.

"They look very queer, Eve," said May, surveying her work.



"If time and labour made good pastry, Eve's would have been excellent, for she spent a good two hours over it, and worked and rolled till her pretty arms ached."—*Page 86.*



"They will be all right when it is baked; they will come hard then, of course," said Eve.

"But, Eve," said Mary, when she returned, "you ought to have boiled them hard first."

"It can't be helped now," said Eve, putting her much-worked pastry over the pie to hide its imperfections, and then proceeding to ornament it and each of the jam-tarts with the letters L. B. for "Little Bricks," cut out of the pastry. This done the three girls carried their work to the kitchen to be baked, feeling very proud of their labour.

Then the custard was made, but in spite of all efforts to the contrary it would curdle; but as some people, eminently Eve and Mary, like curdled custard, nay, even prefer it, this was voted of no consequence. In the afternoon the boys came in to inspect the morning's work, and to help to arrange the room and set the table, for the committee were all most anxious to do everything themselves without any assistance, to show how well they could do it if they tried.

At last six o'clock arrived, and with it punctually came Mr. Sandys and Roger.

The committee were a little nervous, but Mr. Sandys soon reassured them, and indeed entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing, even admiring the triumphal arch of toy-bricks on the chimney-piece which May had erected as an appropriate decoration.

"May I ask what made you call yourselves 'Little Bricks,' or will that be peering too closely into your secrets?" asked Mr. Sandys.

St. John gave him the classical origin of the title, but reserved the part which referred to the mission-room, and by this time Harold, who acted as butler, announced dinner.

Great credit is certainly due to Mr. Sandys, that he did not allow the first course, which was certainly unique, to disturb a muscle of his face, but appreciated the kind consideration of his taste manifested by the members in providing the shrimps.

The second course was a greater trial, as he was ~~was~~ subject to indigestion, and Eve's pastry might have ~~we~~ been thrown from one end of the room to the other ~~er~~ without breaking; while the meat, with streaks ~~of~~ ~~o~~ of egg baked up with it, did not look inviting, and the ~~the~~ potatoes fried by his sons were nearly akin to ~~to~~ cinders.

However, Roger and the committee enjoyed their ~~their~~ dinner thoroughly, and were blissfully unconscious ~~as~~ of the culinary shortcomings. After dinner they ~~ay~~ drank the health of the club, and Mr. Sandys made ~~he~~ a short speech, to which the President responded ~~ed~~. They then retired to the drawing-room to finish the evening with a round game, and so ended the first dinner given by the "Little Bricks."

CHAPTER VII.

MAY'S SUBSCRIPTION IS STOPPED.

THE dinner, in the opinion of the Little Bricks, had been a decided success from every point of view, more especially as it had only cost twelve shillings, consequently they had eight to give to the fund. It had had a very good effect on the tempers of the committee too, at least it appeared so, for they went on much more smoothly for the next six weeks; there was no quarrelling, and it seemed as if they would really succeed in attaining their object. True, some of the members had grown tired of it and left; but St. John always thought of some one else to supply the place of the renegade before a week had elapsed. The funds in hand now amounted to eleven pounds, the vastness of which sum struck them all with a sense of the importance of their undertaking, and helped to keep up their interest in it.

Finding that the members were not so likely to continue their subscriptions as the committee themselves were, which was natural enough, seeing that they had none of the privileges enjoyed by these

last, St. John proposed to hold a general meeting once a quarter, to which all the "Little Bricks" should be invited, and then he would read the minutes of the last quarter. This was universally approved of, and the first general meeting was fixed for Christmas week.

As Christmas approached Roger grew somewhat happier; he was sure to have some money given him, and then he would pay St. John, and at last loosen the chain that was binding him so fast. May had lent him a shilling a week since he first asked her, so he now owed her six shillings; but he had paid St. John four of those shillings, the other two and all his pocket-money had gone in cards and debts of honour to Price and some of his clique.

He lived in constant fear of being found out, for there were so many ways in which he might be caught. St. John might any day tell Mr Sandys, as he had threatened, unless Roger paid him pretty regularly; or he might find out that Roger had never bought the lexicon, in which case he would be sure to mention it to the Sandyses; or again, Gerard or St. John might discover his intimacy with Price, as Harold had already done. The secret was safe with Harold, but the others would have felt it their duty to tell Mr. Sandys, unless Roger promised to give up his intimacy at once. And lastly, it was possible May might let out that she

had lent him her money, in which case suspicion would be awakened.

Consequently Roger lived in a constant state of anxiety, and being by nature a nervous boy, he had grown so nervous that he started at every sudden noise, slept badly at night, and frequently woke up in an agony of fear, having dreamt his uncle had caught him gambling in Price's room, or something of the kind. And yet, in spite of it all, he had not the moral courage to say no, whenever Price tempted him; he was dreadfully afraid of being laughed at as "a pious boy," who dare not have any fun for fear of offending his uncle. Roger often saw and heard things in Price's house that he knew his uncle would disapprove of; indeed, he did himself in his heart of hearts; and yet, although he was really far happier with Gerard and Harold, he could not summon up sufficient strength to keep away from all these evil influences.

Temptation is like a Will-o'-the-wisp. It exercises a strange fascination over us, till we feel bound to follow where it leads, and if we yield to it the result is that we fall into the swamp, and if we are not rescued we sink altogether. It is the bad gases rising from the swampy ground that make the false light of the Will-o'-the-wisp. It is the glare and glamour of sin, with its bright side turned towards us, that we call temptation.

Roger was in great danger of sinking into the

swamp never to rise again, and though he was often sick and tired of the dance his will-o'-the-wisp led him, still he continued to follow it. He had taken Harold with him once to Price's, but he dare not try to take him again; the boy had been so shocked by the goings-on of Mr. Price and his friends, that Roger was half afraid his cousin might have a fit of repentance and confess to his father that he had disobeyed him. Harold did not do this, however. He knew what the consequences would be, even if he voluntarily acknowledged his fault, and he had no desire to brave them, so he contented himself by vowing never to go there again.

In a less direct way Roger was misleading May also, for having lent all her money except what went to the Little Bricks to her brother, May had none for her own requirements; and she was expected, as she told Roger, to buy her own gloves. May's gloves were very shabby, and she was obliged to have recourse to various little subterfuges to hide them from her aunt, so as to avoid any inquiries into her money matters. She had succeeded in doing this till a few days before Christmas, and felt pretty safe now, for on Christmas day both she and Roger would certainly have some money given them, and then she could buy some new gloves.

The girls' holidays began a week before Christmas, when Miss Helder went home to her own people, much to the delight of her pupils, with none of

Whom was she very popular. A day or two after she had gone, Mr. Sandys offered to take the two Marshalls, Eve and Mary, with May to the west-end to see the shops, and to buy some Christmas presents.

"How much money have you to spend, May?" asked Eve, as the three girls were waiting for Mr. Sandys.

"None," said May.

"How is that, May? What have you done with all your pocket-money?" asked Mrs. Sandys.

"The club and my gloves take it all," said May, blushing.

"I don't think the gloves take much, May, judging from those you have on. Why, when did you last have a new pair?"

If May were to answer two months ago it would be the truth, but then she would have to account for eight shillings, all of which had gone to Roger. So she answered, "Last week," which was not the truth, but which she hoped would lead to no further inquiries.

"Then pray go and get them, dear; your uncle won't care to see you in those shabby ones," said Mrs. Sandys. May went upstairs, but as there were no gloves to look for, she did not attempt any search, and remained upstairs till Mr Sandys was ready, and shouted to her to come down. Happily for May, as she thought, her aunt had

disappeared, so no more unpleasant questions were asked.

"May, Aunt Minnie asked me to be your banker to the extent of half-a-crown, as you have no money," said Mr. Sandys, when they had started. "Here it is."

May was delighted; for now if she could only get away from her uncle, she could buy some gloves, and no one would know anything about it. But this was not at present practicable, for to walk with Mr. Sandys was considered the best part of the whole treat, and consequently had to be taken in turns. Eve as usual managed to get with him at first, but May dare not take Mary into her confidence, so she must wait till it was Mary's turn to walk with Mr. Sandys, and then Eve, she knew, would delight in managing it for her. They went by underground railway to Gower Street, and then May, knowing there were no shops for the present, for they turned up Gower Street, took her turn with her uncle. When they reached Oxford Street, May changed places with Mary, and confided to Eve that she wanted to buy some gloves without her uncle knowing it.

"That is soon done," said Eve; "I'll ask him which is the way, and then we can slip into a draper's and run after them. Which way are we going, Mr. Sandys?"

"Straight on till we come to the circus," was the answer.

"Splendid!" said Eve, dropping back. "Now, May, the next draper's we come to, in we pop, so make up your mind what colour you want, and be as quick as ever you can. Here is a shop, go in. I'll stand by the door and see if they miss us."

"It is such a big shop, Eve, I don't like to go in alone," objected May.

"What a coward you are, May! Come in and be quick. Some kid gloves, please," said Eve to the shopman, who looked somewhat surprised at seeing two little ladies, one so remarkably pretty, enter a shop in this crowded street without any attendant. The shopping under Eve's auspices was very soon finished, and then the two children ran as quickly as they could thread their way through the multitude of passengers, till they came in sight of Mr. Sandys and Mary, who were blissfully unconscious of their proceedings.

May now felt quite safe. The gloves were in her pocket, and could be put on before she reached home. So she gave herself up to enjoying the beautiful things in the bazaars and shops. She felt a little awkward when Mr. Sandys asked her what she was going to buy with her half-crown, but she managed to evade the question, and he, suspecting she wanted to buy a present for her aunt or himself, forbore to make any more inquiries.

The wonders of the shop-windows soon drove May's gloves from her thoughts, and she reached

home in the old ones, and having left Eve and Mary at their house, ran upstairs to give the boys an account of her walk.

"Why, May, how is it you have not changed your gloves?" said Mrs. Sandys, interrupting May's flow of conversation.

"I had not time, Aunt Minnie; the others are in my pocket," said May.

"Let me see them, May, and another time, when I tell you to put on new gloves, don't carry them in your pocket."

May fumbled in her pocket, and at last produced the new gloves, which she managed to get out of their paper, but in her nervousness pulled the ball out too, and it dropped on the floor.

Mrs. Sandys, whose suspicions were aroused, picked it up and looked at it.

"Why, May, you bought these gloves to-day; where are those you told me you bought last week?"

"They are lost," said May.

"Why, you told me yesterday those were the best gloves you had," interrupted Gerard.

"Yes, I remember your saying they were more holy than righteous," said Harold.

"It was not worth remembering either," said Roger.

"May, there is something very wrong in all this. Come upstairs with me; I must inquire into it," said Mrs. Sandys.

May gave Roger an appealing look as she left the room to follow her aunt, but he pretended not to notice it. This being the case, she thought it wiser to take refuge in silence, and all Mrs. Sandys's questions failed to get any answer from her fast-closed lips.

"Well, May, I am very sorry, but you must stay here in your own room till you will tell me," said Mrs. Sandys at last, and there May had to stay for the rest of the evening. Her aunt came to see her before she went to sleep, but she could get no more out of her, though the child seemed softened and tried a good deal.

Roger crept in to May's room as he went up to bed, and found her sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Don't cry, May; you are a brick not to tell of me," said Roger, wishing to be consolatory.

"I shan't be a Brick long, Roger; they will turn me out of the club when they find I have told so many stories," said May.

"What did you tell stories for?"

"I could not help it, I did it for your sake, Roger, so that they should not know I had lent you my money; and it was no good after all."

"How do you mean 'no good?' It is good at least; I mean it has done me good and you too because now I know you care for me."

"But I shall have to tell, Roger, to-morrow. I

have to go to Uncle Charlie after breakfast, and know he will make me."

"Nonsense, May, he can't make you if you don't choose to tell him."

"Yes, but he can and he will, I know. It is because he is so kind, Roger, I shall have to tell him, besides I want to now. I know it was very wicked of me to tell those stories, and I am so frightened and I know it is because I am so wicked. Oh Roger, dear Roger, please let me tell him and don't be angry with me; may I?"

"May, if you do you will get me into an awful row, so I warn you; do as you like, but mind if you sneak I shall get punished much worse than you will be if you don't tell."

Sneak is not a nice word, and it cut May to the quick; she was willing enough to suffer the consequences of her own faults, but to get Roger into trouble too was more than she could bear to do, so she called him back as he was turning away without having bid her good-night.

"I won't tell, Roger, I promise I won't," said May; but long after Roger was asleep and dreaming, his little sister was lying trembling, cowering under the bed-clothes and dreading the interview with her uncle in store for her on the next day. Once or twice sheer terror nearly drove her into her aunt's room to make a full confession, but the thought of Roger restrained her.

When the morning came, May was relieved to find her breakfast was sent up to her, so she was spared the ordeal of facing all the family while she was still in disgrace, but as soon as breakfast was over Mr. Sandys sent for her.

May pursued the same line of action that she had taken with her aunt the previous evening; she maintained absolute silence, and to all her uncle's questions vouchsafed not a syllable in reply. She had reckoned without her host though, in supposing by this means to keep her own counsel. Mr. Sandys was not a man to be trifled with; he was quite as determined to get an answer to his questions as May was not to give one.

"Very well, May," he said at last, when no amount of persuasion would induce her to answer, "I shall not let you move from this spot till you have answered this question. Did you tell your aunt the truth yesterday about those gloves or not?"

For a long time May made no reply, and a looker-on who was aware of the fact that Mr. Sandys had a meeting to attend at noon, might have thought it doubtful who would win the battle. In point of position the advantage was certainly on his side, for he was sitting and May standing in front of him; on the other hand, May had no urgent business to attend to and could spend the whole day standing there without inconveniencing any one but herself, whereas Mr. Sandys was so pressed this particular day, for it was

Christmas-eve, that he hardly knew which way to turn, and could ill afford the time he was spending on May. To be stared at fixedly for any length of time is not agreeable to any one ; to May it was at all times particularly disagreeable, and she began to think she could not bear it much longer. And as her uncle continued to look at her without saying a word, she burst into tears. Crying, however, availed her nothing ; Mr. Sandys paid no attention to it, but sat silently looking at the unhappy little figure before him, pitying her no doubt in his heart, and, though anxious to get away, not showing the least impatience.

At last May made up her mind that if he would only repeat the question she would answer him, but her uncle showed no signs of doing anything of the kind, and at last May could bear it no longer and sobbed out :

“ I told a story.”

“ How was that ? ” asked Mr. Sandys, drawing the child close to him.

“ I did not want Aunt Minnie to know that I had not any gloves, so I bought some with the half-crown you gave me.”

“ But how long is it since you bought any gloves ? ”

“ Two months,” answered May, looking very much ashamed of herself.

“ And you told Aunt Minnie you bought some last week and had lost them. You see, May, you

have told several stories ; one lie nearly always leads to another, and you know of all sins lying is the most hateful in God's eyes. Just think how our dear Lord, who was the truth Himself, must hate a lie, and how it must grieve Him when one of His little ones for whom He laid down His life is guilty of telling one. You ought to be dreadfully sorry for all this, May ; are you ? "

" Yes," sobbed May.

" What induced you to do it ? that is what I can't make out. What did you do with your pocket-money for those eight weeks ? Some of it, I know, went to the ' Little Bricks,' but what became of the rest ? "

" I promised not to tell," said May.

" Poor little child, I am not sure that you are not more sinned against than sinning," muttered Mr. Sandys to himself ; then he added aloud, " But, May, I can't overlook so grave a fault as this. I must punish you. I shall tell your Aunt Minnie your allowance is to be stopped for two months."

This was a terrible sentence in May's opinion, for it would oblige her to leave the " Little Bricks," since if she were deprived of her allowance, she could not pay her subscription ; nay, she was almost afraid it would lead to her expulsion if it were known how she had forfeited her money, and to be expelled from the " Little Bricks " was a doom too fearful to con-

template—so fearful that it gave May courage to speak and ask for mercy :

“ Oh, Uncle Charlie, anything but that ; please, don’t do that. I shall have to leave the ‘ Little Bricks,’ and they will all know why.”

“ You mean because your subscription will be stopped. Yes, they, at least the committee, must know why certainly, May, but I can’t help that. You must take the consequences of your fault. It seems a hard thing to say, but the sooner you learn this truth the better ; sin always brings its consequences with it, and the consequences are always very unpleasant.”

“ But I shall never be happy again if I have to leave the ‘ Little Bricks ;’ besides, it would be such a disgrace.”

“ Not half such a disgrace as telling stories ; it is the sin that is disgraceful, not the punishment, May. But I don’t think you will be expelled from the club ; I shall advise St. John only to suspend you for two months, and if during that time you are truthful, I will see that you are re-admitted. I will speak to St. John before the next committee meeting, and you must explain to the committee why you must cease to belong to them for the present.”

“ I could not do that, Uncle Charlie,” said May.

“ Yes, you can, May, if you try. You will feel dreadfully ashamed, I know ; but that is just what I want you to feel ; and when you have done it come

and tell me, and then I shall believe you are really very sorry and mean to try never to be untruthful again. And May, remember you can do nothing in your own strength ; you must ask God to help you. Will you ? ”

May bent her head very low, and whispered a scarcely audible “Yes.”

“And May, don’t be afraid to tell Him all about it. He knows it all now, but He likes to hear our confessions from our own lips, and there are no secrets from Him ; there is nothing that you cannot tell Him, and no one who can help you in all your difficulties as He can. You may go now and tell Aunt Minnie I want her.”

May went away, feeling very miserable. She knew by Mr. Sandys’ manner that she was not forgiven yet. He was so grave and cold ; then, too, she remembered what he had apparently forgotten, that the next committee meeting was that very afternoon, and that she must summon up courage to acquaint the others with her disgrace. There was some comfort in this last fact too, for perhaps if she could tell her uncle that evening that she had informed the committee of her conduct, he would believe in her penitence and take her into his favour again, and poor little timid May dare not tell him how very sorry she was.

Of course she had to listen to a long lecture from her aunt as well, and though May hated it, no one

could justly say it was more than she deserved — Roger did, but May knew he was wrong. As the hour for the meeting drew nearer, May's spirits sank lower. She could eat no dinner, and when three o'clock struck, she walked to the committee-room with her knees shaking under her as if she were going to execution.

"May, how ill you look," said Eve, as May entered the room. "Have you been eating too many good things before Christmas?"

"No, that she hasn't; she did not eat a mouthful of dinner, and there were mince-pies," said Harold, mentioning a delicacy he could not have resisted under any circumstances.

"Never mind May's looks; let us get to business at once; it is Christmas-Eve, as I need not tell you, and I at any rate want to be off soon," said St. John, who, as May rightly guessed, had seen Mr. Sandys before the meeting, and was anxious to make it as easy as he could for the culprit.

What the business transacted that day was May never knew; in point of fact, it was unimportant, and related merely to the non-payment of some one's subscription; but had it touched on any vital question in connection with the "Little Bricks," May would not have noticed it. She was engaged, as she had been all the morning, in framing as brief a speech as possible in which to make known her trouble.

At last the meeting seemed about to end all too soon for May's comfort, and she made two or three vain attempts to address the chair; her voice seemed powerless, once she got as far as "St. John," but this was uttered so low that not even Gerard who was sitting next her heard it.

At length help came from the president, who saw the pain she was enduring, and in spite of his utter contempt for a lie in any form, could not help pitying the little pale-faced girl who sat trembling before him.

"Have you all paid your subscriptions for this week?" he asked.

"Of course; what a question!" said Miss Eve immediately.

Then May took courage and blurted out to the astonishment of all save St. John:

"No, I have not. I can't either for two months. I have told stories, and my allowance is stopped. Don't expel me, please, St. John. I'll pay the subscription for these two months out of my Christmas-money, if you will let me come back."

Now May was a great favourite among her cousins and friends, besides it was well known how shy she was, and all present recognised how hard it must have been to her to make this confession, so the prevailing feeling for her was pity, mingled with a little admiration for her courage, and before the president had time to answer, a cry

of "Let her come back, St. John!" ran through the room.

"Certainly, if Mr. Sandys will consent, it does not rest with me," said St. John, and then May, overcome with confusion, rushed out of the room.

"It was about those gloves, I know," said Eve, as soon as May was gone, "but I should just like to know what May has done with her money; given it to Roger, I believe. I'll find out."

"I don't think you will, because that is just what the row has been about. May won't tell what she has done with her money," said Gerard.

"I shan't ask May, I shall ask Roger the next time I see him, and I shall tell him what I think of him too," said Eve.

The next time Eve saw Roger happened to be five minutes later, when she immediately asked him if May had lent or given him her money, to which question Roger refused to reply, whereupon Eve proceeded to tell him she thought him a mean boy to get his sister into trouble, and if she were a boy instead of a girl she would fight him; an opinion which, as may well be supposed, did not tend to endear Eve to Roger. It also had the effect of angering him against his sister, whom he suspected of having broken her promise; but on questioning May on the subject he found he was wrong; and when he heard she had been punished, he reproached himself bitterly.

"I am so sorry, May. Don't you hate me for being such a bad brother to you?"

"No," said May, who was feeling very happy in a subdued way, now her ordeal was over; "I love you dearly, Roger, and I always shall, whatever you do."

Yes, May, that is true enough, most likely; your love is like most women's love, as unselfish as it is unreasonable. Go on loving, and it will bring you no end of misery, since in your case the object seems remarkably unworthy of it; at any rate, you will have the consolation of knowing such misery is more precious than selfish happiness.

Roger was touched not so much by May's words as by the sweet look in her eyes as she uttered them, and to hide his feelings he turned the conversation by asking how many of the Marshalls were coming in for snapdragons that evening.

May felt very little disposed to join in this entertainment, her one idea being to be reconciled to her uncle as soon as possible; this done, snapdragons might possess some charm for her, otherwise they had none. But Mr. Sandys was out, and did not come in till all the fun was over, and the Marshalls just about to take their departure. May heard his step in the hall, and slipped out to meet him, and tell him what had happened at the meeting, and then crept up to bed very happy, his kiss of forgiveness having re-opened the gates of paradise

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A FOG.

ROGER's receipts this Christmas were not so great as he had hoped and anticipated ; they only amounted to five-and-twenty shillings, eight of which he at once paid to May in discharge of her debt, perhaps with a feeling that he would get it back again when he wanted it. In this, though, he was destined to be disappointed, for May went straight to St. John and asked him to let her pay her subscription for the two months during which she was suspended, then and there.

" But if you can pay your subscription, you need not be suspended, May," said the president.

" Yes, I must, because I told those stories ; besides, Uncle Charlie will insist upon it," said May.

" I see," said St. John. " So you won't be able to come to the meetings ; but you will be helping us all the same. Look here, May ; I don't like to take the responsibility myself, but I'll speak to Mr. Sandys about it and do my best for you."

Mr. Sandys allowed May to give the eight shillings as a donation, but would not let St. John

receive it as a subscription, as that would be tantamount to remitting May's punishment entirely.

To return to Roger. His first intention after paying May was to hand the rest of his Christmas money over to St. John, but he thought afterwards he might as well go to Price's first and see if he could not win something while he had money to play with. Instead of winning, he lost all but five shillings, which he feared would not pacify St. John, and if it did would leave him penniless. As for his allowance, that now went wholly to Price, who threatened to tell of him unless he received half-a-crown every Saturday, and that, he declared, was a dead loss to him, though Roger could not see how he made that out, but he was so completely in Price's power that he was obliged to yield to his demands.

St. John Wood was not satisfied with the five shillings, nor was he at all inclined to deal leniently with Roger, who he now felt certain was the cause of May's trouble.

" You must pay me twelve shillings at the end of next month, or I warn you I go straight to Mr. Sandys. I won't stand any more shilly-shallying," were Wood's parting words, and with these ringing in his ears Roger left his friend. He was at his wits' end ; he could not think how to get out of his difficulties ; he was almost driven to go to his uncle and make a clean breast of everything. Money he

must have, and how to get it he could not tell. It occurred to him to sell or pawn some of his possessions, but his great difficulty here was, if he did so the articles might be missed; awkward question would then be asked, perhaps even by May in innocence. Borrowing was out of the question, he now owed money to most of his friends; no, there was one whom he had not yet tried he now remembered, one Frank Montague, a schoolfellow who lived near Regent's Park.

It was a long way from the Sandys' house, and having no money, Roger would be obliged to walk if he wished to see Montague before the term began again. He certainly did wish to do so, and before Saturday, so he asked Harold to walk with him, but Harold declined on the plea that his father did not care for Montague's acquaintance. Roger sneered at this, hinting that for Harold to go to Price's and to refuse to go to see Montague, who was certainly less objectionable than Price, was to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Harold was firm though, and Roger, fearing his cousin might turn queen's evidence against him—in other words, acquaint Mr. Sandys with Roger's intimacy with Price—he desisted from urging him, and set off alone immediately after an early dinner.

It was very foggy when he started, and his uncle advised him not to go far from home, as evidently a dense fog was coming on. Roger replied he

was ~~only~~ going for a stroll, and set off at a great pace.

He calculated it would take him an hour and a half to get to Montague's house, which was the other side of Regent's Park; if he was right he would be home in time for tea at half-past six. In consequence of the fog, which grew denser as he proceeded, it took him very much longer, and it was with great difficulty he found his way across the park; in the streets it was not so bad, as the gas and the lights in the shop-windows helped to guide him; but the traffic even now was almost stopped, and the few cabs and vehicles still remaining in the usually crowded thoroughfares were crawling along at a snail's pace, and in some cases the horses were led by the drivers.

Still Roger plodded on, and managed to keep on the middle path across the park, and finally reached his friend's house about six o'clock. He was invited to tea, and knowing that meal would be over long before he reached home, he accepted the invitation on the understanding that he must leave directly after. Montague wanted him to stay the night as the fog was so thick, but this Roger declined, knowing it would alarm his uncle and aunt if he did not get back. As it was, he had made up his mind he must tell them where he had been; but as his mission had been successful, Montague having lent him five shillings, he felt in sufficiently good spirits

to stand the lecture which was inevitable. — leaving the Montagues' he determined to walk across the park to Portland Road Station, and there take the train to Moorgate Street; this would save him a good deal of time, and he calculated on getting back before eight o'clock.

When he first started he persuaded himself that the fog was not so thick as when he came; it might have been darker, but that was because the sun had set, but he certainly thought the fog was clearing as he crossed the road and entered the park, one of the gates of which was just opposite the Montague house. At first Roger kept to the gravel walk and tried to walk fast, but he soon found this was impossible, for he could not see an inch before him and was soon brought to an abrupt pause by coming into collision with a seat, which sent him sprawling on to the gravel; he picked himself up and went slowly and sadly, wondering if he should ever reach the turning on his left which he ought to take. After plunging on for what seemed to him an interminable time, he came to the conclusion he had missed it, so resolved to strike across the grass thinking if he went straight on he could not possibly miss his way. This was about the most foolish thing he could have done under the circumstances as he soon found out for himself, for once on the grass he could not find the gravel again; he turned back at last, as he thought, and walked in the

direction he supposed himself to have come from, but in vain, no welcome sound of gravel under his tread gladdened his ear. Indeed, the utter silence in the heart of this great city was very terrible; all traffic had stopped, even if Roger had been near enough to the road to hear the roll of the wheels; moreover, the thickness of the atmosphere deadened all sound. Hitherto he had met no one since he entered the park, and yet as the gates did not close till nine, he thought it improbable that he should be the only person trying to make his way through it. If he could only get to the keeper's lodge in the middle of the park he would not mind, for he could wait there even all night if it came to the worst, and shelter of any kind would be welcome, for the fog was penetrating his clothes, which were already wet and uncomfortable; besides he was cold and could not walk fast enough to keep himself warm.

"It is my belief that I am walking round and round," thought Roger, when he had been wandering on the grass for an hour or more. At last it occurred to him to shout, in the hope that some other passenger in the same state might hear him, or better still a policeman, who he thought would be in duty bound to help him out of the park.

No one answered, and Roger, half frightened at the sound of his own voice in the midst of this thick darkness, desisted and made another effort to regain

the path. This time he was more successful, and to his joy he found himself on the gravel again; but he was so muddled now that he had not the least idea which way to go, whether to turn to the right or the left; and when he found by the width of the path it was only a side road and not the centre one, he was still more puzzled.

It must lead to somewhere either way, thought Roger, and if I can only get anywhere, I shan't care, as long as it is out of this fog; at any rate, I'll keep on the path; no more of that grass for me. If I could only meet some one, I should not mind so much.

But as the path seemed unending, and Roger was determined once having found it not to leave it, he grew very much frightened. The darkness and the loneliness were in themselves alarming to him, and coupled with a guilty conscience which gave its owner no peace, were almost unbearable. All at once he felt himself brought to a sudden stop, by coming into collision with another person, who turned out to be a soldier, who was on his way to the Albany Street barracks, and no more likely to reach them that night than Roger was to get to Portland Road.

After the first start of surprise was over, Roger rejoiced inwardly at having come across another human being in the midst of this wilderness of fog, though that being was only a soldier, who had

apparently had rather more to drink than was good for him. Any society was better than his own under the circumstances, and his spirits, which had sunk to a very low ebb, went up several degrees at the rencontre.

"Well, young man, and where are you bound this beautiful evening?" asked the soldier.

"I am trying to get across the park to Portland Place," explained Roger.

"And I am trying to get out in the opposite direction; but, I suppose, if we get out at all it will do for you better than wandering about here."

Roger assured him that it would.

"Let us keep to the path, then; I'll lead the way."

"I have been keeping to this path for the last hour," said Roger. "I can't make it out; it must lead to somewhere."

The soldier's reply to this was a burst of loud laughter.

"I guess it does not, though: if you have been walking on it for an hour, it must be the path round one of those centre beds; we'll try—you go one way and I'll go the other and see if we meet. Roger was not very much inclined to take this advice, but not wishing to lose sight of his new acquaintance, and fearing the man might laugh at him if he objected, he complied, and, sure enough, in a couple of minutes they met again.

"That is settled," said the soldier, "now it is no

use keeping to this path, so let's trust to our **luck** and strike off in this direction; one way is just **as** likely to be right as another."

Accordingly they started off, but only to **wander** over the grass, the monotony of their walk **varied** occasionally by collisions with trees and bushes, **till** Roger was so tired he could scarcely walk at all.

"Cheer up, sir! we shall get out by daylight **if** we don't before; the fog will lift by then **most** likely, and there is nothing to be afraid of **except** walking into the water; we might do that if **we** don't take care, for I know no more than a new-born babe whereabouts we are."

This was not reassuring, and Roger earnestly wished he were safe at home instead of **wandering** about all night in a dense fog with a soldier, at **the** risk of falling into the water at every step.

Once or twice he tried to pray, but it was no **use**; he could not do it; he dare not lift up his heart **to** God, when he felt how wicked and deceitful **that** heart of his was. Just as the fog hid the light **of** heaven from him, so his sins hid God's face **from** him. Had Gerard or Harold been in his position, he knew well enough they would not have been **half** so frightened as he was; they would have **trusted** themselves to His tender care, and have felt as **safe** as they did at home in their beds. He remembered often to have heard his uncle tell them all, **they** need fear nothing in this world, except sin; if **they**

were sure that the Everlasting Arms were round hem, then death itself need have no terrors.

But while Roger was wandering about Regent's Park, his people were terribly anxious about him at home. They were alarmed when he did not come in to tea, especially when Mr. Sandys mentioned that Roger had told him he was only going for a stroll.

"He must have met with some accident, I fear," said Mrs. Sandys, "or he would have been home before now."

May, who had been unable to get any tea on account of Roger's absence, at this remark burst into tears, and Harold thought it better to say he knew where his cousin was gone, even at the risk of offending him.

"How do you know he has gone to see Montague, Harold?" asked Mr. Sandys.

"Because he wanted me to go with him."

"Why didn't you?" said his father.

"I knew you would not like it, father."

"Good boy!" said Mr. Sandys; a remark which had the effect of making Harold feel exceedingly uncomfortable, when he remembered his visit to Price.

"If Roger does not get back by eight o'clock I must go and see after him, if I can find my way to the underground."

"Perhaps he will stay all night at the Montagues," suggested Gerard.

"No, I am sure he won't. He does not want any one to know where he has been, so he won't do that," said Harold.

"He may not have reached the Montagues'; at any rate if he is not back soon, I must go and see after him; must not I, May?" said Mr. Sandys.

May cheered up a little at this, and when eight o'clock struck and no Roger returned, Mr. Sandys set out to inquire for him. May begged so hard to be allowed to sit up till her uncle returned, and declared she could not sleep till she knew Roger was safe, that Mrs. Sandys, seeing how excited the child was, consented to let her.

Nine, ten, eleven o'clock, and still no welcome sound of the latch-key in the hall door, and now Mrs. Sandys grew alarmed about her husband as well as for Roger; but shortly after eleven they heard his step in the hall, and ran out to meet him.

"Where is Roger? O Uncle Charlie, have not you found him?" cried May, clasping her hands together, and turning her little pale face up to her uncle in an agony of fear.

"No, my dear child, I have not found him yet, but I have heard of him. He left the Montagues' house about seven o'clock, and was going to walk across the park to Portland Road station. I have been in the park with Montague and his father, but it was useless staying longer; we should only have lost ourselves probably, though they know it so well:

it is impossible to find your way even with lanterns in this fog. How I reached the station is almost a miracle. I inquired at Portland Road at the booking-office, and of the porters, if they had noticed a boy answering to Roger's description, but among so many passengers, it is impossible to rely upon their memories. They don't remember him, and I think myself the chances are he is still in the park."

"O Uncle Charlie! what shall I do? Can't I go with you and look for Roger? Do let me," exclaimed May, catching hold of Mr. Sandys' arm, and looking pleadingly into his eyes.

"Poor little May!" exclaimed Mr. Sandys, stroking May's head as he spoke. "It is useless going to look for him till the fog lifts, my child, and even then you could not help me by coming with me; on the contrary, taking care of you would hinder my search for Roger."

"But can't I do anything, Uncle Charlie? It is terrible to have to stay at home doing nothing while Roger is in such danger."

So it is, May, but it is woman's work, and the sooner you learn to do it the better perhaps.

Mr. Sandys might have thought this secretly, but he did not say so; on the contrary, he whispered to her to go and do the only thing that could be done to comfort May or help Roger under the circumstances.

"You can pray for him, May."

And May went upstairs and prayed, with **the** tears streaming down her cheeks, till such a sense **of** rest and comfort came over her that she rose **from** her knees, and throwing herself on her bed, **too** exhausted to undress, she was soon fast **asleep**. Sleep on, May; when you are older, sleep will **not** come so easily.

There are plenty of men in the world lost **in** a far denser fog than Roger is now in, and alas! **many** women who are powerless to do aught to help **them** out, except lift their streaming eyes and **aching** hearts to Heaven on behalf of them.

CHAPTER IX.

EVE IS DISOBEDIENT.

E left Roger stumbling about in the fog at the
Is of his new acquaintance, whose last suggestion
they might fall into the water if they did not
e care. This was the worst thing that could
Pen to them in Roger's opinion, and rather than
that risk he parted from the soldier, who was
ermined to plunge on through the darkness till
made his way out of the park, for neither of them
any idea that it was past midnight, and the park
es had been locked several hours.

Roger stood still for some minutes after the soldier
t him, hesitating whether to lie down on the wet
ass or wander carefully about in search of a seat.
e decided on the latter course, and happily soon
me across one, on which, utterly exhausted with
s wanderings, he threw himself full length, and in
few minutes fell asleep, in spite of the cold and
s wet clothes. When he awoke it was daylight,
d though still very foggy he could see a few yards
front of him. He rose stiff and numb, his head

aching, and feeling faint from want of food and exposure, and in a few minutes found himself in the wide path in the middle of the park again, to his great joy, for he knew his adventure was nearly over now.

A quarter of an hour brought him to the gates, which were not yet open, and here he waited for twenty minutes, during which time the wind rose and the fog began to lift; and Roger, getting tired of waiting till the keeper came, thought he would stroll about and see if he could find his companion of the previous night, who was probably asleep on a neighbouring bench.

It was now clear enough for Roger to see he was not far from the water, and he walked down to the edge, thinking it must have been much nearer to him than he supposed the night before. Presently as he walked by the side of the lake he saw something red and black a few yards in front of him, and when he reached it found it was a soldier's cap lying close to the brink. He picked it up with a feeling of horror, for he guessed its owner must have fallen into the water, in which case it was scarcely possible he had escaped drowning. He put the cap down where he had found it, and walked up and down to see if there were any traces of the man, but the water was deep, and looked innocent of having caused the soldier's death.

When Roger reached the gates again, they were

being opened, and he informed the gatekeeper of what he had seen and of his suspicions. The man made him give his name and address, and leave a written account of what had happened with him, informing him that if the body were found he would be required as a witness at the inquest. He assured Roger immediate steps would be taken to investigate the matter, and at length Roger was on his way home. His reflections as he walked, for the underground trains had not begun to run as it was barely eight o'clock, were by no means pleasant. He was horrified at the escape he had had, for had he remained with the soldier, his fate would probably have been the same, and Roger had no doubt as to what had become of the man. Then he was not at all certain of his reception when he reached home. He had led his uncle to suppose he was only going for a stroll, whereas he had fully intended and had carried out his intention of going to Montague's; and Montague, though not a forbidden acquaintance, was one whom Mr. Sandys had often cautioned him not to cultivate.

At any other time he might have been disposed to deny having been there, but he dare not do so to-day; on the contrary, he determined to acknowledge it at once, and was half inclined to make a clean breast of all his evil doings, when he thought of the danger he had first escaped, for he felt it

would have been an awful thing to have died with such a load of sin on his conscience.

As he drew nearer home, however, his good re—solutions grew fainter and fainter, and when he reached the door-step he had decided to admit nothing beyond having been to see Montague. The door was opened immediately, and May, hearing his voice, came bounding down the stairs to meet him, and Roger was sufficiently softened to return her greeting with almost equal warmth, as there was no one near to witness it.

May's shouts soon brought the whole family down except Mr. Sandys, who was searching for him, and had been since the fog lifted. Roger was rather glad of this respite, as he dreaded meeting his uncle, especially as he soon found they all knew where he had been; but by the time he had taken the hot bath Mrs. Sandys prescribed for him, and eaten some breakfast, Mr. Sandys returned.

To Reger's great surprise his uncle said not a word of reproof, but merely came up to him, grasped his hand, and laying his other hand on his head, said :

"God bless you, my boy! and I thank Him ~~You~~ are safe."

Roger, who was shivering with cold and was sitting wrapped up in a rug over the fire, all his bones aching, could hardly believe his ears; his

She had been up all night, searching for him the greater part of it, and yet, instead of blaming him for his conduct, he only welcomed him back far more warmly than his own father would have done. The boy was touched, and said in a low voice—

"I am very sorry for the trouble I have given you."

"Never mind that, my boy. I am sorry for her reason," replied his uncle.

That was all he said, but Roger knew perfectly well what he meant; and perhaps it cut him deeper than any lecture would have done.

"I have just come from Regent's Park. They have found that poor fellow's body. He was drowned last night," said Mr. Sandys, presently. "You will like to appear at the inquest."

Roger, however, was spared this ordeal, for he was ill to go out, having taken a very bad cold which threatened to end in rheumatic fever; but thanks to Dr. Marshall's skill this was warded off, and in a week Roger was well again.

By the time the holidays were over, Roger was due to go to school with Harold the first day, and the next day Miss Helder was expected to return and resume her duties, an event which Eve was not dreading with pleasure. Indeed the prospect of introducing a young lady into one of her mischievous schools, and as ill-luck would have it, she went in to May, and while in this frame of mind an ob-

servation of Mr. Sandys' gave an impulse to her genius for mischief.

"Where did you get that ruled paper from, May?" said Mr. Sandys, eyeing narrowly a piece of paper on which May was writing an exercise for Miss Helder.

"Aunt Minnie gave it to me," answered May.

"That is all right. I was afraid you had taken it from that forbidden spot, my table in the committee-room."

"Oh, no, Uncle Charlie. I should not think of touching anything on that table," said May, looking alarmed at the very idea of such a thing.

But if May would not think of such a thing, some one else did, and that some one was of course Eve, who had only been looking out for an opportunity of doing wrong, and gladly welcomed the one now offered her.

It was a splendid one in Eve's opinion, one very easy to embrace, inasmuch as it could be done with so very little trouble to herself, and when done would bring unpleasant consequences on the whole of the committee of the "Little Bricks," who would most certainly have to pay the penalty for her offence; moreover, it would involve her in a dispute with Mr. Sandys, which would lend a little excitement to the monotony of her life. Eve wished to show him that she was not afraid of him; and that if it suited her to do so, she could disobey him, regardless of consequences.

"What exercise are you doing, May?" said Eve, when Mr. Sandys had gone.

"French," said May. "You know we always do Noel and Chapsal for Friday; so I thought I had better do mine."

"I think I'll do mine too," said Eve; "so good-bye."

May looked up rather surprised at this alacrity on Eve's part, for the exercise in question was not obligatory, and Eve seldom performed any works of supererogation. Eve left the room without answering May's inquiring look; but, instead of going home, made her way to the committee-room, and walked straight to the forbidden table, intending to help herself to some of the paper Mr. Sandys had spoken of, but seeing the room was arranged for a meeting of some kind, the idea struck her how fine it would be to be discovered calmly writing her French exercise at Mr. Sandys' table. None of the other children would ever have thought of such a proceeding, she was sure, or, if they had thought of it, would have had the impudence, Eve called it the courage, to carry it out.

Delighted with the idea, Eve flew home for her Noel and Chapsal, and then seated herself at the table and proceeded to write her exercise with great care and diligence. Half-an-hour passed without interruption, and Eve began to wonder what time

the meeting would be, when she heard a door open and shut and Mr. Sandys's step in the passage.

For a minute her courage failed her, and she devoutly wished the ground would open and swallow her up, and she cast a hasty glance round the room to see if there were any place in which she could hide. There was a cupboard, but on second thought Eve scorned to use it, and with beating heart waited the result.

Mr. Sandys stopped short when he saw the pretty culprit occupying his particular place at the tabooed table.

"Eve!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here ? what is the meaning of this ?"

"I am writing a French exercise—it was so nice and quiet in here, Mr. Sandys," said Eve innocently.

"Did you forget that I have forbidden you all to touch that table ?" said Mr. Sandys, very unmercifully gathering up Eve's books and papers.

"No, I did not forget," said Eve.

"Then you are a very naughty child. I forbade any of the 'Little Bricks' to enter this room again—though I am very sorry all the committee should suffer for one member's insolence—and I expel you from the club until you apologise for your conduct to me," with which Mr. Sandys took Eve by the shoulders and, much to her astonishment, turned her out of the room.

This was not at all the kind of treatment she had

expected; her dignity was greatly offended, and she went home very angry indeed, to storm at Mr. Sandys in Mary's presence.

"How dare he touch me! even papa would not have done such a thing. And the idea of expecting me to beg his pardon, indeed! catch me. I don't care whether I am expelled or not from the 'Little Bricks,'" said Eve angrily.

"Oh! yes, Eve, you do; you know you would hate it. Why, see what an interest you have always taken in it; besides, it is such a disgrace to be expelled from a club."

"No, it is not; at least, not in my case. I have done nothing I am ashamed of."

"But, Eve, I think you ought to be. You have been very rude, almost insulting, to Mr. Sandys, who has always been so kind to all of us. Why, you had no business in that room at all at this time. I can't think how you dared do such a thing," said Mary.

"Dared! I am not such a coward as you seem to think, Mary," said Eve.

"O Eve! you ought to be sorry. See what a scrape you have got us all into; we are turned out of that room, and it will be such a drawback to the club; besides, all the others will be so sorry; and then you are expelled, too—it is dreadful. Eve, I am afraid it will break up the 'Little Bricks' entirely. How could you do it?" said Mary.

"What nonsense you talk, Mary. Of course it won't break up the 'Little Bricks;' they can hold their meetings in another room, can't they? We will have them in this schoolroom for the future; and as for Mr. Sandys expelling me, I shall pay no attention to that. It is the president and the rest of the committee who have the right to expel me, not Mr. Sandys; and I should just like to see them doing it," said Eve.

Mary made no reply; she saw her sister was in one of her worst moods, and she very wisely left her alone, as any opposition would only have provoked Eve to persist in a course of rebellious actions.

That evening, St. John received the following note from Mr. Sandys:—

"Mr. Sandys regrets to inform the president and other members of the committee of the 'Little Bricks,' that, owing to the insolent conduct of one of their number, whom he this afternoon found seated writing at the table he had forbidden any one to touch, he is therefore compelled to refuse the use of his parish room to the society, who in future must hold their meetings elsewhere. Mr. Sandys begs that he may be informed when and where the next meeting will take place, in order that he may attend it."

This letter came like a thunderbolt on St. John, who was utterly unconscious that one of his sub-

ordinates had been misconducting herself, for he guessed at once Eve was the culprit. He had too much work to do that night to go and see Mr. Sandys about it, so he sent the letter on to Gerard, requesting him to show it to Harold and May, and then to take it in to the Marshalls, and let him know as soon as possible if either family could lend a room for the meeting the following afternoon. Gerard answered the letter in person an hour later.

"It is Eve, of course," was St. John's greeting.

"Yes, it is too bad of her. Father is very angry, and no wonder," said Gerard.

"I knew that from his letter. What in the world made her do it?"

"Pure mischief. She says she has always longed to touch that table because she was told not; and now she has done it, she is happy, I suppose."

"Well, she shan't be happy long," began St. John.

"My dear fellow, she does not care a fig. The meeting is to be held in the Marshalls' schoolroom to-morrow, and Eve says she shall come to it, as she does not pay any attention to what father said about expelling her," said Gerard.

"She shall not come to it, I'll see to that, and she is, of course, expelled for the present, as your father says so. And I think we ought to send her to Coventry till she begs his pardon. Eve would hate

that more than anything; in fact, I don't know a—
thing else she would care for," said St. John.

"It seems rather hard, but if you think it will
her any good, I will agree to it. I believe if =
were to apologise, father would let her come b=
to the club; I am sure he would, for he never d=
things by halves, and I don't want to lose Eve."

"Nor I, she is more fun than all the rest P
together; but she must be taught she is not to do
she likes exactly. I expect we shall have a sce
to-morrow when my lady hears our decision," sa
St. John.

"I hope the others will agree to send her
Coventry, but I don't believe they will; Mary won
I am sure."

"They must, or they shall be expelled too, exce~~E~~
Mary; she is her sister, so that is different; we ha
better let her do as she likes; she is sure to do thi
best thing, little wiseacre," said St. John, and shortl
after Gerard departed.

Eve paid no attention to all Mary said to th
contrary, but persisted in her resolve to attend th
meeting, relying upon her popularity with the boy
which she felt sure would induce them to thin
leniently of her conduct.

Accordingly, when St. John arrived at the mee
ing, he found all the committee, including Eve, i
their places; and wishing to make it as easy for h
as he could under the circumstances, he went up

'r and whispered that as she was expelled she had
tter retire.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Eve: "I
n't be expelled unless all the committee agree
it."

"There is no rule of the kind existing, Eve; but
you wish it I will put it to the vote; that is, if
u agree to do as the majority approve. At the
ame time, it would be better for you, and pleasanter
or us all, if you were to go at once, without any
more discussion."

"Thank you a thousand times, but I like fair
play," said Eve.

"Well, then, as I expect Mr. Sandys every
minute, and I don't wish him to be further insulted
by seeing you present, I will put it to the vote.
Those who think Eve ought to be expelled from
this society, kindly hold up their hands."

"St. John, I don't wish to vote; please can I be
neutral?" asked Mary.

St. John agreed to this proposition, and the rest
of the committee held up their hands without any
further hesitation, upon which Eve rose with a very
high and mighty air to leave the room, her move-
ments being a little quickened by her anxiety to
get outside, before Mr. Sandys, whom she had no
wish to encounter, appeared.

"Wait a minute, Eve, please. I have a word
more to say. Gerard and I have agreed that until

you apologise to Mr. Sandys for your behaviour, the committee can have no intercourse with you; in fact, as far as we are concerned, you are in Coventry. Do you agree to this, Harold?"

"Yes; Eve has had us all turned out of our committee-room, so she ought to pay for it, I think," said Harold.

"Do you, Mary?"

"No, whatever Eve may do, I am her sister, and I shall speak to her; I think she has done very wrong, and I am very sorry, but I would rather be expelled from the 'Little Bricks' myself than cut her," said Mary.

"I thought as much; well, Mary, we will make an exception in your case, because, as you say, she is your sister; but, May, you must not speak to Eve, mind that," said the president.

"Oh, St. John! please let me. You know I am suspended myself for another month, and I should not be here, only Uncle Charlie said he wished me to hear what he was going to say to the meeting," said May, looking very much alarmed at her own boldness in thus addressing the chair.

"It is impossible; I can't make any exception except in Mary's case; you must agree, May," said St. John.

"Never mind, May; I will send you to Coventry if you don't like to send me there. We will put in that way; it will satisfy the committee, and

won't hurt us," said Eve, leaving the room by one door just as Mr. Sandys entered it from another. He looked very grave as he caught sight of Eve's retreating figure, and, taking the chair St. John at once offered him, addressed the meeting.

"I am exceedingly sorry to have to turn you out of my room, but after Eve's deliberate act of disobedience I have no other course; but I repeat I am sorry that you must all suffer for the fault of one. But please remember this is invariably the case in much bigger things than this, and it is a fact to make us think well over our conduct, for most of our actions, good and bad, affect other people; our sins do not only bring trouble and unhappiness on ourselves, but they involve other people in the consequences. I hope my room is only taken from you for a time, for, as I told Eve, if she apologises for her conduct I will lend it to you again."

"And will you allow Eve to return to us then, sir?" asked St. John.

"I won't promise that, but I will think it over; meanwhile, Mary, do your best with Eve."

Mary promised to do so, and Mr. Sandys left the committee to finish their meeting alone.

They were all very much put out by being turned out of Mr. Sandys's room, besides the society had received so many checks that they were naturally enough rather dispirited; first, there had been Roger's cheating and his subsequent withdrawal;

then May's suspension, besides various minor troubles ; and, lastly, this affair of Eve's, which was the worst of all. No wonder that it was a very dull meeting, and that the members all went home feeling very doubtful whether they would ever attain their object or no, and very much disposed to lean to the opinion that they never would.

CHAPTER X.

THE BANK IS ROBBED.

EVE left the committee-room feeling very much injured. This was a great deal more than she had bargained for: being deprived of Mr. Sandys's room she cared very little about, but to be expelled from the club not only by Mr. Sandys, but by the unanimous consent of all save Mary, was decidedly unpleasant, and further, to be sent to Coventry by them all was worse ; it was cruel to think that they should have dared to do it too, to her who was considered a queen among them all, and who certainly thoroughly appreciated this position. Eve grew more angry at every stair she ascended on her way to her own room, till she was furious by the time she reached it. If they thought they would by this means force her into apologising to Mr. Sandys and so get back to his room, they were very much mistaken, and so they would find out; and then, as a vent to her excited feelings, she went downstairs and practised most energetically till tea-time. Miss Helder knew this was a sure sign Eve was unhappy, for she generally

had great trouble in getting her to practise, though she had a talent for music, and for her to spend an hour or two at the piano showed she wanted an outlet for her vexation.

Her practice over, Eve appeared herself again, and laughed and talked, if anything, more than usual for the rest of the evening. She made up her mind to show the Sandyses and St. John she could do without their society well enough if she chose, so, for the next few days, when any of them came in, Eve put on her gayest manner, and chattered away utterly careless whether they answered her or not. In fact, she answered for them in the most provoking way.

"I know exactly what you were going to say," Gerard. You need not trouble yourself to speak. You agree with me, I know," she would say, knowing perfectly well Gerard would by no means agree with her, and hoping by this ruse to force him to contradict her.

But though the "Little Bricks" persisted in their stern purpose of keeping Eve in Coventry, they could none of them, not excepting St. John, help laughing to hear her rattle on. Mary took a grave view of the case. She felt certain Eve's gaiety was assumed, and, in her opinion, it was terrible that her sister should go on day after day without showing any signs of repentance for her behaviour to Mr. Sandys.

Mary hoped this state of things could not possibly go on much longer. Mr. Sandys's birthday was on the Thursday in the following week ; that is, nearly a fortnight after Eve's escapade ; and as this was always a gala day, the Marshalls always spending the evenings with the Sandyses, Mary thought it certain Eve would make it up before the day arrived.

The sisters always gave him a present, but this year their funds, owing to the subscription to the "Little Bricks," were very low, and they had decided some time ago they must be content with giving him some little trifle of their own handiwork instead of buying anything for him. Eve had been at work in illuminating a text to hang over his study-door, but since her row about the writing-table she had not touched it ; at least, so far as Mary knew.

"Eve," said Mary, a day or two before the birth-day, "where is the illumination you are doing for Mr. Sandys ?"

"I don't know," said Eve shortly.

"Had not you better finish it ? His birthday is the day after to-morrow."

"I am not going to finish it. In fact, I do know where it is—I have torn it up."

"O Eve ! how could you ? What are you going to give him then ?"

"Nothing. You don't suppose I am going to put myself in the position of having my present re-

turned, and I am quite certain Mr. Sandys would ~~not~~ refuse to accept anything from me."

"Not if you make it up with him first. Do Eve ~~not~~ will you? It is so miserable going on in this way ~~now~~ it makes me so unhappy. I can't bear to see Mr. Sandys look so grave and take no notice of you ~~now~~ whenever you meet, and I hate the others keeping you in Coventry, though I don't see what else they could have done. Besides, Eve, I don't want to preach, but it is so wrong of you holding out so long—you know it says in the Bible we ought not to let the sun go down on our wrath."

"It is Mr. Sandys who is angry, not I. I am ~~not~~ in the least angry with anybody; I simply do n't care a straw about it," said Eve.

"I don't believe that. I know you do care. You are so fond of Mr. Sandys, I am sure you care, and I can't think why you don't go and tell him you are sorry."

"Because I am not sorry. I can't tell a story. You don't understand, Mary; I like having fun; it amuses me. Of course, we shall be friends again some day; we can't go on for ever like this. How it will be made up I don't know; at any rate, I have no intention of apologising at present. And as for those others putting me in Coventry, they may do it as long as they like, only when they let me out I'll put them in, and keep them there till they humbly beg to be let out. I'll pay Mr. St.

in out for this, and Gerard too ; and as for that ung monkey Harold, I should like to box his ears : his pains."

" But, Eve, how awkward it will be on Thursday you don't make it up before then. We are all ing there to tea, you know, as we always do," said Mary.

" Not in the least awkward," replied Eve. " I am not going."

" Not going ! O Eve ! why, we have never missed since we were old enough to go. You must go."

" Indeed, I shall not. A pleasant evening I should have certainly ! no one speaking to me except you and papa and mamma and Mrs. Sandys, who would spend the evening in trying to get me alone and lecture me on my wickedness. No, thank you ; I shall remain here, and have tea in the nursery with the children."

Mary argued the question for nearly an hour, and did her utmost to persuade Eve to change her mind, but all in vain ; she remained firm as a rock till Mary, in despair, told the whole story to Dr. and Mrs. Marshall.

Dr. Marshall treated the matter very lightly, feeling certain, when it came to the point, Eve would change her mind and go with the others ; but when Thursday arrived, and Eve refused to go in to wish Mr. Sandys many happy returns of the day, as she and Mary always did directly after breakfast, Mary

determined to speak to Mr. Sandys himself on the subject.

So when she had congratulated him and presented the drawing she had done for him, Mary whispered that she wanted to speak to him for a minute.

"Is it about Eve?" said Mr. Sandys, as he followed Mary into the hall.

"Yes, I am so sorry, Mr. Sandys. Eve is not coming to-night. I have tried so hard to persuade her, and I can't;" and the tears stood in Mary's eyes as she spoke.

"Shall I try? Suppose I send her a little note. Will that do, do you think?"

Mary was delighted, and ran home with a light heart, for Eve never could refuse to come now, and surely this would pave the way for a reconciliation. An hour later Eve received the following note:—

"MY DEAR EVE,—Will you come this evening? I shall be very sorry if you allow what has passed to keep you away. I shall be at home all this afternoon if you would like to come and speak to me.
Yours affectionately,

"G. SANDYS."

Mary watched her sister narrowly as she read this note. Eve coloured, and, though she tried to hide it; Mary knew she was touched; then she rose, fetched her desk, and answered it in silence. The answer was very short, merely—

"Thank you very much, but I would rather not me."

Mary, not liking to ask any questions, fully believed, till she went upstairs to dress, that Eve was going too, and was so disappointed to find she was not, that she could not help crying.

Eve's absence threw a shadow over the entertainment. She was the life of the party generally, and her lovely face and high spirits were missed by all. She spent the evening, as she had intended, in the nursery; but when the children were in bed, having nothing else to do, she followed their example, and for the first time in her life cried herself to sleep with Mr. Sandys's note under her pillow.

"Did you enjoy it, Mary?" asked Eve the next morning, looking as if such things as tears had never saddened those bright eyes of hers.

"Not much. I missed you; we all did. The only person who was in good spirits was Roger, and I never saw him so agreeable."

"That was because I was not there to tease him," said Eve.

"Mr. Sandys told me to tell you he was very sorry you did not come, and that it had quite spoilt his birthday," continued Mary.

Eve did not care to pursue this subject, so she changed the conversation, and asked if anything was said about the "Little Bricks."

"Oh, yes, to be sure, I forgot to tell you. Mr.

Sandys has told May she may attend the meeting next Saturday, and join the club again from then ; it is because May told Mrs. Sandys of her own accident that she had broken a vase the other day. I do wish you could come back next Saturday too, it is so dull without you."

But it was by no means a dull meeting, although Eve was not present ; on the contrary, it was much more exciting than pleasant. It opened quietly enough ; but on the president going to the bank, a Roger's cash-box was called, to put in the subscriptions for the week, the storm broke out, for when he unlocked it, instead of finding three pounds, lo and behold the box was empty !

"Empty ! The cash-box is empty ! The bank has been robbed ! Every farthing is gone !" exclaimed the president.

"Empty ! The bank robbed !" echoed the others.

"Robbed ! We have been robbed. All our subscriptions for the month are gone—stolen," exclaimed St. John.

"Are you sure, St. John ? Had not you paid the money in to father ?" asked Gerard.

"No ; of course not. I don't pay it in till the last Saturday in the month ; besides, I put in six shillings on Thursday morning, that made exactly three pounds ; two sovereigns, and the rest was silver."

"You must have left it unlocked," said Harold —

o, I did not. Besides, the room was cleaned ednesday, and it has not been used since, so it have been done by a servant," said St. John.

Is the lock broken? Does it look as if it had forced?" asked Gerard.

No; the lock is right enough. See, it locks and locks as easily as possible. It is a patent one, so must have been opened with a skeleton key, unless Mr. Sandys has a duplicate," said St. John.

"It is not father's box, it is Roger's," said Harold; and I know he has lost the other key, because he told me so."

"He ought to have told me so if he has. Some dishonest person has no doubt found it and opened the box," said St. John.

"But what are we to do? It is such a large sum to lose, three pounds," said Gerard.

"It seems as if we should never succeed; we are always having something happen, which stops our work," said Mary.

"Oh, don't let us give it up please, St. John. I do so want to build that mission-room, and we were getting on so well, we must have collected nearly twenty pounds—had we not?" said May.

"Eighteen, May. But what do you mean by giving it up. Of course we are not going to give it up. We must find out the thief. That is the first thing to do, and I must tell Mr. Sandys what has happened," said the president.

"Stop a minute, St. John. It has just struck me — that perhaps the money has not been stolen after all," began Gerard.

"Not stolen! Why, man, the box is empty. Of course it is stolen," interrupted St. John.

"Listen to me first; you don't know what I have to say. You know Eve is very angry with all of us for sending her to Coventry, and expelling her from the club. She will pay us out for that in some way, I am certain. Don't you think it is just possible she may have taken that money and hidden it up for fun? Of course *I know* she would no more take it in earnest than any of us would; but Eve would not stop at much if she wanted to play us a trick," said Gerard.

"I don't think Eve would do that, Gerard; she would not consider it fun to unlock a cash-box and take out money," said Mary.

"Besides, where should she get the key?" said Harold.

"She may have got hold of Roger's, or found another key to fit. I don't think it is a very complicated lock, though St. John says it is a patent one," persisted Gerard, who was anxious to uphold his own theory, chiefly because it was a much less serious matter to open the box and hide the money for a joke than to steal it.

"Let us send for Eve and ask her pointblank," suggested St. John.

"I don't think she will come, and I am sure she would not speak to any of us if she did come," said St. John.

"Let us try at any rate. I'll go for her," said St. John, leaving the room in quest of Eve.

He found that young lady playing the piano, which she continued doing without taking the slightest notice of him, except to play louder.

"Eve, we want you to come to the committee meeting to answer some questions," shouted St. John.

No answer from Eve, except some tremendous words.

"Eve, something has happened—something very mysterious," continued St. John, hoping to excite her curiosity, but she paid no attention.

"I am sure you did it then, Eve. You have hidden that money. Where have you put it?"

Still no answer, but St. John saw this remark had told, for Eve flushed crimson, and her fingers trembled, though she continued playing. Finding it was useless attempting to get an answer, he left her, and went back to the committee-room.

At any other time the committee would have laughed at the president for leaving the chair in his undignified manner, but they were all too dumfounded by the missing money to attempt a joke of any kind.

"She won't come, and she won't speak, and in

my opinion, it looks very bad. I believe she has hidden that money. Anyhow, I must lay the matter before Mr. Sandys."

"Let Mary go and question Eve first, St. John; most likely she will be able to get it out of her. If Eve has hidden it for a joke, we need not tell father anything; he has worries enough now without having to listen to our troubles," said Gerard.

"So he has. I thought the object of this club was to save him worry, and give him a pleasant surprise; instead of which, it seems to me, we have done nothing but treat him to a series of unpleasant surprises ever since the club was started. Mary, will you go and try what you can do with Eve?" said St. John.

Mary went, and in her absence the probabilities of Eve's guilt were fully discussed.

"She must have done it on Thursday evening, she had plenty of time when the Marshalls were all with us," said Harold.

"But how could she have got into this room?" asked St. John. "I forgot that."

"Easily enough; the servants would have managed that. Eve can do anything with their nurse, and she and our cook are as thick as thieves. Eve had only to say she wanted a book or something out of the committee-room, and they would have let her in directly," said Gerard.

Mary returned to report that Eve utterly refused

to answer any questions on the subject, and, from her manner, Mary thought she had had nothing to do with it. The boys, however, would not yield their opinion, and St. John left the meeting to lay the subject before Mr. Sandys, who took a very serious view of the matter. He dismissed the idea that Eve had done it for a joke, as not worth a moment's consideration: he felt certain Eve would never have thought of such a thing! The money was undoubtedly stolen, but by whom was the question, and a very serious question, too. The first thing Mr. Sandys did, when St. John had told him, was to examine the lock of the cash-box, which as St. John said was a very good one, and had not been tampered with; his next step was to send for Roger and inquire for the other key; but he sent St. John away before Roger came in, thinking by this means to be more likely to get at the truth.

"This is your cash-box, I believe, Roger. Have you the key?" asked Mr. Sandys when his nephew appeared.

"No. I gave the key to St. John when I left the Little Bricks; it is their bank," said Roger.

"I know that; but I understand that you have two keys. Where is the other?"

"I lost it a month or more ago."

"Then why didn't you mention it? This box has been unlocked and three pounds stolen out of it, and it has evidently been opened with the right key.

Have you any idea where you lost it? Was it ~~in~~ the house or out of doors?"

"In the house, I suppose. I never carry it about with me."

"Then I shall give orders that the house is to ~~be~~ searched from top to bottom; the key must ~~be~~ found; it can't be lost if it is still in the house. At any rate the fact of its being lost does not divert suspicion from you; only you and St. John ~~had~~ access to the box, one of you, therefore, must have taken the money, unless you can prove that some one else has possession of the key. I can answer for St. John's innocence, but, I am sorry to say, Roger, I can't do so for yours. I counsel you, though, if you know anything of it, to tell me at once; it will be better for you if you do."

Roger made no answer to this, but sulkily left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. SANDYS HAS AN ACCIDENT.

EVE was hurt, as well as angry, to find that the "Little Bricks" suspected her of having robbed their bank even in joke. They ought to have known her better than to suppose for a moment that she could be guilty of such a thing, she argued to herself. Was it likely she would have unlocked a cash-box and abstracted the money? If likely, was it possible without the key? And yet, even Mary seemed to think it not only possible, but probable. Eve had no patience with them; it would serve them right if she did play them a trick to pay them out for their stupidity, the wiseacres! So she racked her brains to think of something to mystify the committee still further.

An anonymous letter was the first thing that suggested itself, and Eve immediately adopted the suggestion, and, getting pen and paper, composed the following missive:—

"To the President and Committee of the Club of 'Little Bricks,' the Writer sendeth, greeting:

" MOST REVEREND, WISE, AND POTENT SIGNIOR ———S,
—It having come to the ears of the undersigne ———d,
that this learned and most wise society have su——s-
tained a heavy loss from their bank, the object ———of
this letter is to beg them at once to go in a body ———o
the centre bed of the square garden, and there, r——
gardless of gardeners or interfering householders, ———o
dig a hole in the centre, and search *till they find t* ———e
missing money.

"A WELL-WISHER."

Eve was highly delighted with her composition; the only drawback was, try as she would, she could not disguise her handwriting. She tried round-hand, running-hand, writing backwards, but all in vain. She knew they would detect her. In despair she tried German characters, which were more successful as far as disguising her writing went, but had this objection, none of the committee would be able to read them.

"I know," exclaimed Eve at last, "how stupid of me. I will get Nurse to copy it out; none of them have ever seen her writing;" and she ran upstairs to put this idea into execution.

Nurse, who would have done anything for Eve, raised no objection, and the letter was done up, addressed to the secretary, and posted without any

further delay. Eve calculated that it would be delivered that evening, and so it was, much to poor little May's consternation. She handed it to Gerard to read, and, it being a wet night, he sent Harold across to St. John with it.

"What do you think of it, St. John?" asked Harold, as soon as St. John had read the document.

"I think I had better take it to your father at once and ask his opinion. He suspects Roger, I fancy; but if this letter be true, I don't think Roger had any finger in it. The only thing that makes me inclined to doubt him is, he has paid me part of some money that he owed me, and I don't know where he could have got it from."

"He borrowed it from Montague, I believe, the day he was lost in the fog; that is what he went for," said Harold.

"That is a clever trick certainly, borrowing of Peter to pay Paul. Roger will get himself into a very bad scrape one of these days. You don't know, perhaps, that he borrowed two pounds of me for his new lexicon. He still owes me five-and-twenty shillings."

"His new lexicon! what do you mean? Roger has not a lexicon; he always uses mine since he lost his, and a nuisance it is too," said Harold.

"All right, Harold. I tell you what it is, Roger is going to the bad, there is very little doubt about

that, and I shall go to your father and tell him what ~~s~~ at I know. You may call it sneaking if you like, but ~~but~~ it is the best and the kindest thing I can do. Per-~~ter~~haps Mr. Sandys may be able to save him."

"But look here, St. John, before you go to father ~~s~~, let us do as this letter says, we may as well try it ~~it~~. Perhaps it is from Eve; she may have hidden the money there; or, perhaps, Roger took it, and is in ~~a~~ a fright about it, and so has returned it anonymously ~~l~~ sly. At any rate, let us go the first thing to-morrow ~~o~~ w morning and look. It is Sunday, so the gardener ~~n~~ won't be there. We shall never get such a goo~~o~~od opportunity; and if you were to show that letter to father to-night, he would make us wait till Monday ~~E~~ day morning, which would be dreadful. I hate waitin~~g~~ for anything," said Harold.

"Well, we must have a meeting to-morrow morn~~g~~ in the square; we had better say before break~~fast~~ fast, as soon as it is light; that will be about eight ~~H~~ ~~g~~ht. You let Mary Marshall know."

"Mary won't come on Sunday, I am sure, thoug~~h~~ the object of the club is to build a mission-~~roon~~ ~~m~~," said Harold.

"At any rate you can ask her. I would not do ~~o~~ it myself except in a case of this kind, where it ~~—~~ is almost a necessity; of course we might wait ~~—~~ till Monday, but we should not be able to dig a hole ~~in~~ in that bed, with the gardener in the garden, that ~~—~~ is certain, without tipping him," replied the preside~~nt~~,

whose serious tone would have delighted Eve had she heard him.

Next morning Eve had the satisfaction of watching the search party from her bed-room window, having heard from Mary, who refused to attend, of the projected meeting. The three boys, Harold armed with a spade, and May, let themselves into the square and made a solemn procession to the centre-bed which was just opposite the Marshalls' house. Here Eve saw them pause and hold a council before venturing to transgress one of the rules of the garden, which prohibited walking on the beds; apparently it was decided that Harold should be the scape-goat of the party, for he suddenly made a dash into the middle of the bed, and began to dig furiously, the others first looking on gravely as if dumb-stricken by his audacity, and then, as Harold regardless of consequences heaped up the earth, they all burst out laughing; Eve opened her window gently to listen, and soon heard Harold suggest that instead of laughing they should all watch and cry 'Cave!' if any crotchety householder appeared to put a stop to their proceedings.

They complied with this request so far as to take a cursory glance round at the neighbouring windows, during which Eve hid behind the curtain; and when she again emerged from her hiding-place, the committee were laughing and talking by Harold's side, while he continued to dig, and much to Eve's delight,

slowly sauntering home from an early service, came Mr. Sandys down the square. At first she hesitated, debating whether or no to warn the others, but thinking over her own wrongs, the spirit of mischief was too strong within her, and Eve kept quiet, and waited to see what would happen.

Mr. Sandys appeared deep in thought, and unless attracted by the sound of their voices, did not seem likely to see the delinquents, a contingency which Eve would certainly in her present mood have deeply regretted; but as he drew nearer the laughter grew louder, and just as he reached his own door-step Eve had the satisfaction of seeing him turn round to see whose the voices were. For a few minutes he seemed scarcely able to believe his own eyes, for to see his sons, May, and St. John Wood, usually a pattern of propriety, on Sunday morning digging a hole amid shouts of laughter on the centre bed of the garden, which even to walk upon to recover a lost ball was considered little short of a crime by the residents of the square, was too appalling. What could they mean? Mr. Sandys determined to find out, made his way to the gate, and surprised the culprits before they were aware of his approach. After a little conversation, Eve saw St. John hand Mr. Sandys her letter, which he read, and then ordering Harold to fill up the hole he had dug without any further delay, the procession filed back, Mr. Sandys leading the way. The "Little Bricks" looked

so crestfallen that Eve was quite satisfied with the success of her plan, and only regretted that she could not hear what Mr. Sandys, who kept turning round to address the others, was saying.

She persuaded Mary to go in after breakfast and hear May's version of their escapade.

"Was Mr. Sandys angry with them, Mary?" asked Eve.

"Yes, he was rather. He did not like their doing it on Sunday morning, or secretly in the gardener's absence."

"Why, they dare not have done it in his presence," interrupted Eve.

"No, but he thought them very foolish to do it at all: he said their own common sense might have told them it was only a foolish trick, and that they were geese to give it a moment's credence. Did you write that letter, Eve?"

"Does Mr. Sandys suspect me of that too, pray? It seems you all attribute every piece of mischief that happens to me."

"No we don't Eve dear, at least I don't, and I am sure Mr. Sandys does not; he told St. John and me too he felt certain you had nothing to do with the cash-box, and he was very sorry indeed that you had been suspected and accused of it," said Mary.

"Ah! Mr. Sandys understands me better than any one; he is my best friend after all," said Eve.

"Then why don't you make it up with him?" said

Mary; to which question Eve made no reply, b—ut went up to dress for church in a very thoughtf—ul mood.

She was getting tired of her quarrel with M—r. Sandys; to be so completely ignored by him was m—ot exciting; she was grateful to him for taking her p—rt in the matter of the stolen money, and she was ve—y fond of him, and in her heart of hearts very unhappy on account of the estrangement between them.

At church that day Mr. Sandys preached on ~~the~~ text, "Little children, love one another;" and as Eve listened she could not help thinking he ~~was~~ very like the beloved disciple in many ways. There was in him, as in St. John, an intense love ~~for~~ Christ, and through Him for His little ones; and though, like the apostle, his language and thoughts were often very high above the heads of his hearers, yet he could at times, as to-day, speak so simply that the youngest child could understand him.

He seemed to be standing to-day at the foot ~~of~~ the Cross, with St. John and the holy women, pointing to His Divine Master, and begging ~~his~~ hearers, for His dear sake, to love one another. The whole sermon spoke of peace, and love, and forbearance, and as Eve listened she made up her mind she would not go to bed that night till she had made her peace with her dearest and oldest friend.

There was one hour on Sunday when Mr. Sandys

as generally to be found alone in his study, from half-past five to half-past six, when it was time to get ready for the evening service. As a rule, he spent the afternoon in visiting the Sunday school and some sick people, but he was always home by seven to tea. On this particular Sunday, however, he was preaching at a church in the west end, and, when Eve went in to ask to see him, had not turned. Mrs. Sandys asked her to stay to tea, and Eve, not liking to acknowledge what she had done for, accepted the invitation, and managed to keep up a brilliant conversation with Roger and Mrs. Sandys, utterly ignoring the others. Tea was over, and still Mr. Sandys did not return, and at last Eve, much against her will, for she could make no excuse for remaining any longer, was obliged to go home and dress for church. As she left the drawing-room there was a loud knock at the door, and when she reached the hall she heard stamping of feet, strange voices talking in harsh whispers, a piercing shriek from the servant who opened the door, and, shrinking back into a recess, she saw four men carry past her Mr. Sandys, pale, immovable, and apparently lifeless; an irresistible impulse induced her to lean forwards as they passed her, and the glimpse she caught of the kind face he loved so dearly, looking as if those lips would never move again, those eyes never raise their fast-closed lids, seemed as if it would remain for ever

indelibly printed on her brain. Eve drew a long breath, and rushed, pale and trembling, from the house to her own home: she clashed the bell, flew past the servant, who thought she had gone mad, straight to the dining-room, where, as she anticipated, Dr. Marshall was dosing in his arm-chair.

"Father, father," cried Eve, shaking him; "go quick, Mr. Sandys is killed; don't stop, go."

Dr. Marshall started up, saw Eve standing terror-stricken before him, her face deadly pale, her lips white as ashes, her eyes dilating with fear, and, without stopping to ask any questions, did as she had bidden him.

A few minutes later, Mary, coming into the room to wake her father, found Eve lying senseless on the hearthrug; she rang for help, and Eve, who had only fainted, soon recovered consciousness. Her first inquiries for Mr. Sandys did not alarm Mrs. Marshall or Mary, they only thought she had not quite recovered her senses and was wandering; but her persistent questions at length induced Mrs. Marshall to send and inquire next door, and before the messenger returned Eve had told them all she already knew. On hearing this Mrs. Marshall went in herself to see if she could be of any assistance, promising her girls to come back in a few minutes and tell them what had happened.

They soon learnt the truth; Mr. Sandys had been preaching at a church in the west-end, and had

ten a hansom on leaving it, intending to drive me; in the middle of Holborn the horse fell down, he was pitched out of the cab, his head struck a curbstone, and he was taken up insensible. A gentleman who witnessed the accident came to his instance and superintended the taking him home.

“What does father say, mamma? Does he think can cure him?” asked Eve.

“My dear child, he can’t say; he has called in other opinion; at present, poor Mr. Sandys is ve and that is all, but while there is life there is pe. It is impossible to tell how it will go with n; your father won’t leave him to-night. I asked e children to come in here, but, except Roger, they prefer remaining at home; poor little May is art-broken, she seems to feel it even more than e boys, though Gerard looks dreadfully frightened, d Harold is sobbing at the foot of the bed. While for Mrs. Sandys, she is as calm and collected as ssible, and seems very hopeful.”

“Are you going in again to-night, mamma?” said ve.

Mrs. Marshall replied that she was not, but that Roger had come back with her, and the last thing, before they closed the house for the night, would go cross and tell them how the patient was. There as no change when Roger came in, and that night as a terribly long one for all the Sandys, but erhaps for no one so unbearable as for Eve, who

found it utterly impossible to sleep, and bitterly reproached herself for her conduct. If Mr. Sandys were to die without seeing her, how could she ever forget it? It would sadden her whole life, Eve thought; not knowing how easy it is to forget, as years roll on and separate us from the past. How could she have been so unkind as to have deliberately annoyed him, and so foolish as to miss all the opportunities offered her for repairing the wrong she had done? Why did not she go in that morning before church, and speak to him before this terrible accident occurred?

Now she might never again have the opportunity; it was quite possible, almost probable, that she would never again see him alive, never again hear that kind voice, never again feel the touch of those "hands that could not bless in vain, by trial taught your pain." How could she sleep with thoughts like these crowding through her brain? She wondered what May was doing; was she in bed and asleep, or, what was much more probable, was she creeping about the house listening anxiously for any news of her uncle? Then Eve thought of the telegraphic communication between her room and May's, and knocked on the wall to see if she could make her hear; to her great delight May answered almost directly, and Eve then gave three knocks, which was the signal for May to adjust her end of the rope, which hung, when not in use on a nail outside her bed-room window. Eve

always kept her end in her room in readiness for any emergency, but then she was allowed to sleep with her window open in all kinds of weather, and May was not.

The uninitiated might wonder why the girls should have chosen this somewhat elaborate method of communication, when by leaning out of their respective windows they could have conversed freely; but the profound secrets in which girls of all ages are wont to indulge, are not to be proclaimed from the housetops, or spoken from a window at the risk of being heard by any other member of the household, even at the dead of night, when it might reasonably be supposed all rational people would be asleep. On this particular occasion there was really some danger of their voices disturbing the watchers in Mr. Sandys's room, which was immediately under May's, so it was just as well they should have recourse to their contrivance.

May soon gave the signal that she was ready, and Eve sent a message to know how Mr. Sandys was, and whether May had been to bed. In a few minutes there came a tear-stained little note in reply:—

“ He is alive, but that is all. I heard one of the servants say so just now when I went to listen. O Eve! if he dies what shall we do? There is no one like Uncle Charlie in all the world. I am so miserable. I must go to bed, or it will worry poor Aunt

Minnie; but I know I shan't sleep, and my head aches from crying. Good-night, Eve dear. I am very sorry for you.
MAY."

This sad little note comforted Eve somewhat. May sympathised with her, and sympathy is always sweet. She did not reproach her either, but seemed to understand the pain her friend was undergoing without waiting to have it explained to her. In this May pleased Eve better than Mary could have done, for she would most likely have felt it her duty to improve the occasion by diluting her sympathy with a little reproach.

Eve finding May was going to bed, soon followed her example, and, in spite of their grief, sleep came to the aid of both before another hour had elapsed.

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CHAPTER XII.

CONCERNS ROGER.

ROGER, as we have seen, borrowed five shillings of Montague on that memorable day when he was lost in the fog, and, as soon as he recovered from the cold he had taken, he went to see his friend Price, hoping the five shillings would act like a bone thrown to a barking dog, and silence him for the present.

In this, however, he soon found he was mistaken.

" You owe me two pound ten, and you suppose I am such a fool as to be contented with five shillings. What do you take me for ? " he asked.

" I will pay you the rest if you will only give me time, Price. There's half-a-crown a week certain for you ; and if my luck would only change, or some of my stingy people would tip me, I would pay you every farthing to-morrow."

" It is all very well to talk—words cost nothing, we all know ; but all I can tell you is, if you don't pay me pretty sharp too, I will call on old Sandys

and let him know what nice quiet habits his nephew ~~had~~ has acquired."

It did not occur to Roger to suggest that this threat was very unlikely to be carried out, seeing that it would expose Mr. Price as well as himself, and the last thing that young gentleman desired was that the light of day should shine on his proceeding. All Roger thought of was to appease his so-called friend as soon as possible, though how to do it puzzled him, seeing that he had no more money, and money only would satisfy Price.

"Won't your sister lend you some more tin?"

"No; she has none to lend. I tell you, Price, I can't for the life of me do more than I have done for the present. May has paid all her money in to the 'Little Bricks.'"

"Where does that much-respected society keep its money, pray?"

"Why do you ask? What do you mean?" said Roger, startled by the meaning tone of Price's voice.

Price saw he was going too fast, so he pulled himself up and said airily—

"Don't look so virtuous, pray. I was only going to suggest that you should borrow of them."

"They would not be so green as to lend to me if I asked them," said Roger.

"Now, if you only knew where they kept the money the thing would be easy enough to arrange. You might borrow without asking: it would have

Double advantage, it would spare you the disagreeable task of asking, and them the equally unpleasant duty of refusing."

"But would it not be more like stealing than borrowing, for I could never pay it back again, at least for goodness knows how long?" objected Roger.

"Certainly not, my dear fellow. The intention is everything in these matters; you intend to borrow, not to steal; you don't mean the 'Little Bricks' to lose it, you mean to pay them back when you can. Besides, if you have money you can play, and perhaps win back in an evening all you have lost to me or borrowed from them; in which case, if you know where to get the money from, you can pay it back the next day and no one will be any the wiser. Do you know where they keep it?"

"Yes, in an old cash-box of mine in the committee-room," said Roger.

"Good; you have a key that will open it, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Roger.

"And you can always get into the parish-room, or whatever you call the place? Well now, let me see, this is Wednesday; you must manage somehow to borrow from these dear 'Little Bricks,' pious creatures, between this and Friday; come round here on Friday evening and we'll have some fellows in, and try your luck at 'loo' instead of 'nap;' perhaps

you will get on better at that; and then if you win, as of course you will, you can put back what you borrow of the 'Little Bricks' before their next precious meeting."

"That is on Saturday afternoon. But if I lose, what then?"

"Take the chance of that. You won't lose; and if you do, who is to know you had anything to do with it? No one will suspect you."

"They might, because they know I have a second key."

"Lose the key, my dear fellow; and if any awkward questions are asked, say you have not seen it for weeks."

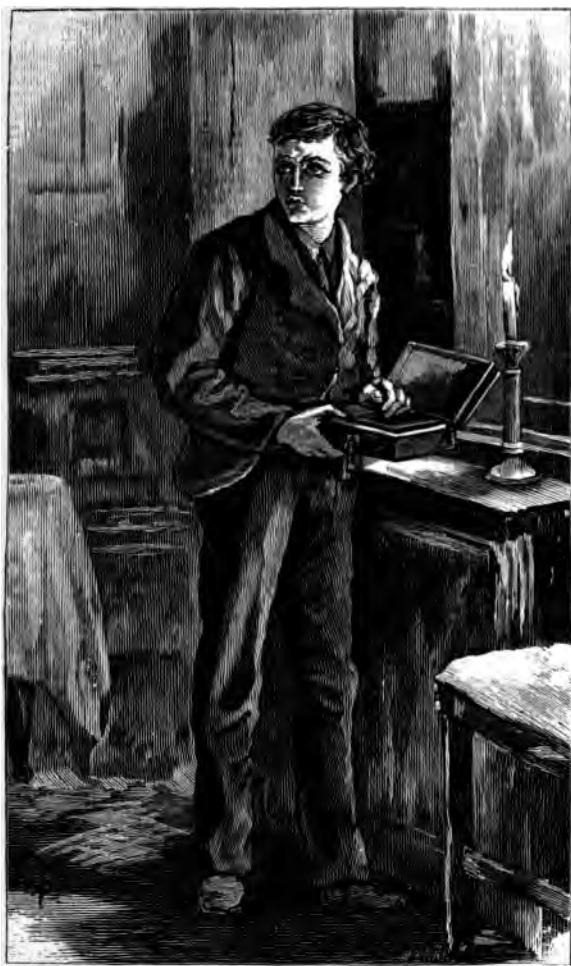
The conversation lasted some time longer, and the end of it was, Roger went home resolved to act upon Price's advice. The only difficulty was to hit upon a time when he was unlikely to be seen going to or coming from the committee-room, in which he had no sort of business. That evening there was a meeting going on in it he knew, and during the day-time he was nearly sure to be seen by some member of the household; the next evening the Marshalls were coming in to keep Mr. Sandys's birthday, but this would be rather an advantage, as, if he could only manage to be late for tea, he need fear no interruption; the family would all be occupied with that meal, and the servants safe in the kitchen getting theirs.

So Roger pleaded that he had not quite finished his work, and asked to be allowed to come in late as soon as he had done; he would then, he urged, be able to spend the rest of the evening in the drawing-room. Permission was given, and no sooner were they all settled at the table than Roger, shoeless and with a beating heart, stole from the school-room, where he was supposed to be working, to the passage leading to the parish-room. The gas lighted him so far, but as soon as he had passed the swing-door which shut the rest of the house off, he would be in the dark, so knowing this he armed himself with matches and candle. The door creaked as he opened it, and Roger listened nervously lest any of the servants should come up to see who was there; but all was quiet, nothing was audible save the voices from the dining-room and the rattling of glass and china.

Satisfied of this, Roger closed the door behind him, and groped his way down the passage, not without some trembling, for he was naturally nervous, and darkness had always terrors for him, which a guilty conscience by no means helped to dispel. He had brought the key of the committee-room (which he knew was always kept locked) with him. Trembling, he unlocked the door and let himself in. It was pitch dark, and Roger carefully struck a match and lighted a candle, shading the light with his hand, lest any of the servants should by chance

see from the house that the room was lighted. The cash-box, as he expected, was in the cupboard, and with bungling fingers he lifted it out, in his nervousness letting it drop heavily on the floor, the sound ringing loudly through the empty room. The noise made him pause, and think twice before he went any further. Then Price's words that he only intended to borrow the money came into his head, and effectually silenced the little voice that was so unpleasantly whispering, "Thou shalt not steal!"

Anxious to escape from this troublesome monitor, and from the large gloomy room, which looked larger and gloomier than ever in the dim light of one candle, he hastily unlocked the cash-box, where to his delight he found two pound ten in gold and ten shillings in silver; he thrust the money hastily into his pocket, relocked and replaced the box and left the room. In his hurry he forgot to lock the door, but he remembered when he reached the end of the passage, and retraced his steps to do it. At last he was safely outside the baize door leading into the house, and having assured himself no one was within sound, he hurried upstairs to his room, hid the money in one of his drawers, washed his hands, though no amount of washing could cleanse them after the dirty work they had just been engaged in, and then joined the others at tea, where, as we have already seen, he was unusually bright and gay.



"The noise made him pause, and think twice before he went
any further."—*Page 170.*



So far he had been successful, and his success excited him, as success is wont to do. During the rest of the evening his gaiety was undisturbed by any throbs of conscience. Roger in his ignorance thought this a good sign, but on the contrary it is a very bad one. Conscience is only silenced when it has been grievously abused. A quiet conscience *after sin* is a very dangerous thing indeed. It is a warning that, if we do not take care, we may lose it altogether, and nothing worse than this could by any possibility happen to us. To be unconscious when we sin, never to know right from wrong, what is this but to live in eternal darkness, to be shut out for ever from the light ?

God is very angry with us when He suffers conscience to be silent. It is well indeed for us then, if we have faith sufficient left to enable us to fall on our knees and cry out, "O God, make clean our hearts within us, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from us."

It is a fearful sin to deliberately disobey the voice of conscience, to quench the light within us, to ignore its presence, to know what is right and willingly to do what is wrong, and Roger was guilty of all this. In spite of anything Price might say to the contrary, he knew he was not borrowing but stealing that money ; he might pretend to himself that he intended to repay it, but unless he won largely the following night he had no means of repaying it.

At present the money was safe in his drawer upstairs, and if he thought about it at all it was only that he was sure to win, and all would be right; so he gave himself up to the evening's amusement, entering heartily into the fun. The next day he was nervous and excited, longing for the evening to come, and fearing lest anything should happen to prevent him from going to Price's; he was obliged to feign an invitation from another school-fellow to excuse his absence from home, but one lie more or less made little difference to Roger in his present mood. At last the hour arrived, and he reached Price's house with the "borrowed" money safe in his pocket. After some little resistance on Roger's part, Price persuaded him that it would be far better to pay him at once the two pound ten now he had it, arguing that this would leave Roger ten shillings to go on playing with, and would also give him his allowance clear again. Roger fell in with this arrangement partly; he had already paid St. John ten shillings, so he could only let Price have two pounds unless he gave up playing, which was impossible, as the only way he had of repaying the "Little Bricks" was by winning the money at cards. As soon as this little matter was arranged, they sat down to play, and at ten o'clock Roger rose with one pound in his pocket, having doubled his ten shillings. This was highly satisfactory as far as it went, but unfortunately it only went to one-third of

He "borrowed" money, and the next day was the meeting of the 'Little Bricks.'

"What am I to do, Price?" he said as Price opened the door for him, and they were alone for a minute. "I have only one pound, and that meeting is to-morrow; it is no use my putting back that one, is it?"

"Certainly not, my dear fellow. You are getting on famously; you have doubled your stakes to-night, you will treble them next time no doubt, and then you can repay the 'Little Bricks.' Look here. Can you manage to get out on Sunday night? My people are going down to Brighton to-morrow for a few days, and as I shall be all alone I have asked those fellows to come in on Sunday; you come too, and we will make a night of it. You will win, and by Monday morning you can return the money with many thanks to the club, and they will be so delighted to get it back that no more questions will be asked."

"But how in the world am I to get out on Sunday of all days in the week?"

"I want you to come at night; there is a latch-key in the house I suppose, isn't there? All right then, when every one is gone to bed, you creep downstairs, undo the door, put it on the latch, take the key with you and come here; afterwards you go back before any one is awake, let yourself in, do up the door again, and there you are, with

three pounds certain in your pocket, perhaps more ; what can be better than that ? ”

Roger did not know except to have left the cash-box alone, which as he walked home he most devoutly wished he had done, for he was already beginning bitterly to regret having ever touched it, not because he was sorry for the crime he had committed, but because he dreaded the consequences, if he were found out. He passed a miserable night ; he did not get to sleep till early morning, and then he had a succession of nightmares, to which even to lie wide awake imagining he was found out ~~at~~ was preferable. Strange to say, what Roger dreaded ~~but~~ more than anything, was May’s grief if she ~~ever~~ knew what he had done ; it would be bad enough ~~for~~ for his uncle and aunt and cousins to find it out ~~at~~, but for May to learn that the brother she looked up to and loved so dearly was a thief, this was more than Roger felt he could bear. He must go ~~to~~ Price’s on Sunday evening, that was certain, and once there he must win, though this was a matter he could by no means be certain about.

He was more hopeful when he awoke in ~~the~~ morning ; all troubles look better by daylight ~~at~~, though as three o’clock approached he grew more and more nervous, till it was almost a relief when he was summoned to his uncle’s study ; the suspense was over at any rate, now he would know whether he was suspected. Mr. Sandys, as we saw, did ~~not~~

eave him long in doubt on this point, and Roger took refuge in pretending to be angry at being suspected. There was one thing he certainly did not want to do, and that was to lose the key, for then he would be unable to replace the money, always supposing he won it on Sunday ; still less did he want any one else to find the key in his possession, so on leaving his uncle he hid it in a flower-pot outside a landing window, which he flattered himself was a safe place, and one nobody would dream of searching.

The rest of that evening and the following morning Mr. Sandys treated him with marked coldness, but as far as Roger could see neither May nor his cousins appeared to suspect him, and in his uncle's absence he had the boldness to discuss the matter with them, and even to speculate on the thief. When he heard of his uncle's accident, his first feeling was of horror, but as this wore off, a sense of relief stole over him ; for the present at least he was respite ; the only person who suspected him was lying unconscious, and perhaps before he recovered sufficiently to take any active part in the matter, Roger would have won and returned the money. His uncle's illness would also simplify his plan for getting to Price's that evening, and so when Mrs. Marshall invited any of the children to spend the evening with her, he mped at it, and went in for an hour or two ; at ten

o'clock, when the Marshalls went upstairs, he returned home telling the servant who opened the door to him, that he was going to sleep next door, and should come in early in the morning to see how his uncle was.

He trusted that in the disordered state of the household this excuse would pass muster, and set off for Price's, having first reported his uncle's state to the Marshalls in tolerably good spirits, buoyed up by the hope of winning.

Price, with two choice kindred spirits, was anxiously waiting for his prey, and welcomed him heartily when he arrived. In his father's absence Mr. Price was able to offer his friends some refreshment, which consisted of an unlimited supply of beer. In the beginning of the evening Roger won largely, but as the night wore on he grew careless, and having had more beer than was good for him, played wildly, and his luck changing, he lost continually till he grew desperate, and went on till all his money was gone, and he rose from the table penniless. He was so muddled by the beer he had drunk, that at first he scarcely realised his position, but when after wandering about the streets for an hour till it was time to go home and see if the house was astir, his brain became clearer, his position struck him as by no means an enviable one. He still owed St. John five-and-twenty shillings, Montague five, and the "Little Bricks" three pounds, for he still salved his

Conscience by calling his theft a loan. Besides this, he was certain Mr. Sandys intended to sift the matter of the cash-box to the bottom, and to leave no stone unturned to discover the lost money, as soon as he was well enough to do so. Roger's only hope therefore was that his uncle might not recover; he was not so bad yet as to wish him to die, but he sincerely hoped it would be some time before he was sufficiently recovered to see after his nephew's affairs.

So while not only his own family and the Marshalls, but all the neighbouring poor, were praying for Mr. Sandys's recovery, the news of his accident having spread like wild-fire, Roger alone was secretly hoping that recovery might be delayed, and it was with a beating heart that he gently knocked at the door early on Monday morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

MR. SANDYS was a big man; tall and proportionately broad, he weighed fifteen stone, so that a fall to him was a very serious matter; moreover, when thrown from the cab, his head struck against the pavement, and he was now suffering from severe concussion of the brain; what other injuries he had sustained it was impossible to tell till he recovered consciousness. All night he lay immovable, but on Monday morning he opened his eyes, and complained of sickness and pain in his head, and soon relapsed into a state of torpor. For days he lay hovering between life and death, conscious for a few minutes, but only to sink back into a heavy stupor. The doctors gave but little hope of him, though, on the other hand, he had a splendid constitution, and this might enable him to pull through where hundreds of other men would have had no chance.

That it was a terribly anxious time for Mrs. Sandys scarcely need be told, but she was a brave woman, and strength was given her to bear the trial.

The two boys Gerard and Harold felt it terribly also, Gerard especially, for Harold was able to go to school, whereas Gerard, who tried his utmost to do his work alone, missed his father at every page he turned, till at last he was obliged to give up in despair. May went every day to her lessons with Miss Helder, by Mrs. Sandys's wish, but she was scarcely able to do them, she was so cut up at her uncle's illness. Eve was as bad, and the only solace she had in those days of anxiety was to be near May, and hear every detail she had to tell. Her sorrow was harder to bear than any of the others, since self-reproach was so largely mingled with her grief. Mary took it more quietly than any of them, though she too was very sad.

"I can't wish so much as you do that he should recover, Eve," she said one day, "because he might not wish it himself. I often think if I were grown up I should not wish to be old. It must be so nice to be able to say with St. Paul, 'I would rather depart and be with Christ, which is far better,' and if Mr. Sandys feels like that, it is rather selfish of us to want to keep him here."

Eve could not look at the matter in this light, nor could she understand Mary, so she dropped the subject. She was very unhappy; and no one, not even May, could altogether sympathise with her. Even at the best, supposing Mr. Sandys to recover, she knew from her father that it would be a long time, perhaps some weeks, before he would be able

to see her even for a few minutes ; and, oh ! what would she give just to be able to ask him to forgive her ? I will write, thought Eve one day ; perhaps he may be able to read a letter soon, and I can trust father to give it him. So she sat down and relieved her feelings by writing a very penitent note to Mr. Sandys, which she sealed carefully up, and felt decidedly happier afterwards.

One day, while Mr. Sandys was still lying in a precarious state, May was sitting in the drawing-room when a strange gentleman walked in ; he was tall and handsome, with a heavy moustache, and looked as if he had come from some hot country, he was so bronzed. May looked up, rather startled ; but supposing it was only some new doctor called in to see her uncle, she rose to leave the room and fetch her aunt. "Aunt Minnie will be here directly ; will you sit down, please ?" she said timidly.

"Not just yet," said the stranger, smiling : "you must be my little May. Don't you know me, May ? I am your father."

May did not know him, and was considerably embarrassed to find herself in the arms of this stranger, and much relieved when she was sent to fetch Roger and her Aunt Minnie. Colonel Sandys had come home unexpectedly ; he had been ill with fever, and was now on sick leave ; he had written to tell his brother he was coming, but had arrived before his letter. He was of course ignorant of Mr. Sandys's

accident, and was much shocked to hear of his dangerous condition; it was a terrible damper to his joy at again coming home to England.

"Roger, Roger, come directly: who do you think is in the drawing-room? Father! Papa! he has come back from India," cried May, rushing into the room where Roger sat at work.

This news fell on Roger's ear almost like a death-knell; nothing could have staggered him more, for of all people in this world, his father was the person he least wished to meet. He did not know much of him, but he knew enough to be quite sure he would be utterly disgusted to think he had a son who had been guilty of theft, for Roger could no longer disguise from himself the fact that his action was no less than stealing. If he had feared his conduct coming to his uncle's ears, he feared his father's hearing of it ten times more. Now he bitterly regretted not having made a clean breast of it to Mr. Sandys; he would certainly have been more merciful to him than his father, who was an honourable brave man, but a martinet; feared as Roger knew not only by his men, but by his officers as well.

Woe betide the young subaltern in Colonel Sandys's regiment, whose debts or intemperance came under his colonel's notice; that young man would have a very bad quarter-of-an-hour when summoned to an audience. And Roger knew that, if once found out in a lie, the culprit had no alternative but to ex-

change into another regiment, so unpleasant ~~did~~ Colonel Sandys make it for him. Under the ~~se~~ circumstances, it may well be supposed that Roger's feelings were anything but pleasant as he entered his father's presence. Colonel Sandys received him kindly, affectionately, but Roger felt miserable, and was racking his brains for some excuse to get away, all the time the interview lasted.

Colonel Sandys attributed Roger's evident nervousness to shyness. He was prepared to find both his children shy and reserved with him; indeed, considering how little time he had ever spent with them, it was impossible it should be otherwise. He hoped, though, during the two years he intended to spend in England, to become better acquainted with them. His idea had been to take a house at Cheltenham for the two years, have May and Roger live with him, get a governess and masters for May, and send Roger to the college. But for the present at any rate this plan was impracticable. Mr. Sandys's condition forbade any immediate change, and Colonel Sandys promised to remain with his sister-in-law during her husband's illness.

A few days after Colonel Sandys's arrival Mr. Sandys took a decided turn for the better; the doctors grew hopeful, and gave out that his ultimate recovery depended now more on good nursing than on medical skill, and as Mrs. Sandys had a genius

for nursing, there seemed little fear that he would slip through their hands.

The "Little Bricks" had been so upset by Mr. Sandys's accident that the Saturday following it had passed without any one thinking of or if they did think suggesting a meeting; but when in the middle of the week he rallied, on hearing the good news St. John Wood called a meeting at the usual hour on Saturday.

It was held at the Marshalls', partly because they were turned out of the committee-room, partly lest they should disturb Mr. Sandys if it were held in his house. Eve was not present, for she had not yet ventured to send her apology to Mr. Sandys, who at present had seen no one but his wife, brother, and the doctors, not even his sons or May; so Eve knowing this, felt it was too soon for her to send her letter.

The "Little Bricks" had had stormy meetings, slow meetings, excited meetings, depressed meetings, but never since their creation had they had such a melancholy meeting as this promised to be. There was the cloud of Mr. Sandys's illness hanging over and darkening the horizon to begin with; Eve was absent, and she was the life of the party; and last, but not least, they had been robbed of three pounds, and as yet had not discovered the thief. Mr. Sandys's accident had not only put a stop to all their attempts to fathom the mystery, for oddly

enough none of them except St. John suspect ~~ed~~
Roger; but besides this, it deprived them of ~~M~~ Mr.
Sandys's valuable help and advice.

St. John's suspicions were roused by hearing from Harold that Roger had never bought the lexicon for which he borrowed the money; and, had Mr. Sandys been well, he would have gone to him and told him all he knew; now he did not know how to act, and he took his place at the meeting full of doubt and anxiety.

"I don't know what the rest of the committee ~~see~~ think on the subject," he said, "but I am disposed to propose that we give up this society altogether."

Groans from the others showed their disapproval ~~of~~ of this proposition.

"Wait till you have heard what I have to say, please. It almost seems to me there is a fatality against us: here we have been turned out of our room; May was expelled, then Eve; Roger resigned; and to crown it all we have been robbed: and more than that, the very person for whom we have got the club up is dangerously ill. I declare, I have hardly the heart to go on with it, and yet it seems a pity to give it up when we were nearly half way, but for this robbery, towards success. Does any one second my proposition that this society, called the 'Little Bricks,' be dissolved at once?"

Loud cries of "No" from all the committee testi-

fied to the wisdom of holding the meeting out of earshot of the invalid.

"What have you to say against my resolution?"

"It is such a pity," said May.

"It is so stupid, after all the trouble we have had," said Harold.

"It would be cowardly to give it up," said Gerard.

"Upon my word you are complimentary, you two. One says it is cowardly and the other says it is stupid; pray, what epithet have you ready, Mary?"

"None," said Mary; "but, St. John, I want to say something. Do you know, I think we have all made a great mistake from the very beginning, and perhaps that is the reason we have had so many drawbacks?"

"Well, this looks promising, certainly. Here is the wise Mary thinks the whole business a mistake," said St. John, who, being worried about Roger, was inclined to be cross.

"What is the mistake, Mary?" said Gerard.

"Why, we got up this society to please Mr. Sandys, didn't we? we wanted to build a mission-room for him because we are all so fond of him?"

"Yes, of course we did; but, whip me, if I can see any harm in that," said St. John.

"Nor I! nor I!" cried May and Harold. Gerard was silent; perhaps he knew what Mary was driving at.

"I think there is harm in it, though. To build a _____ mission-room is to work for God, and if we wish _____ Him to accept our work, it must be done for love of _____ of Him, and not for love of any man, however good and _____ great he may be," said May.

"I believe Mary is right; I am sure father would _____ say she is," said Gerard.

St. John was silent for a few minutes, during _____ which he seemed to be thinking hard, and when he _____ next spoke it was with an evident effort. "I am _____ sure Mary is right. It is a much grander and nobler thing to act for the glory of God than for any other object, and I propose that, instead of giving up the society, we make a fresh start, and that for the future we all try to act from the _____ motive."

This resolution was at once seconded and carried _____ without any opposition.

"Now," said the president, "I must refer to a very painful subject, about which I am in very great perplexity, especially as I am myself placed in a very awkward position. I refer, of course, to the robbery. Now, as I hold one of the keys of the cash-box, suspicion very naturally may fall on me."

Indignant interruptions from the others.

"All the same it may, and for that very reason I wish some one else to act in the matter, more especially as I am afraid I know who it is who robbed us."

"But, St. John, father wishes Uncle Edward to act for him until he is well enough himself, so why don't you tell him all about our robbery?" said Gerard.

"I didn't know that. I will then, for I don't think we ought to let it go on much longer. You see the money is not ours to lose, and if Mr. Sandys had been well, I think he would have settled the matter before now."

"But how could he? How is he to find out who stole the money?" said Harold.

"I think he knows, at any rate I am sure he suspects, but I shan't mention that to Colonel Sandys; I shall simply tell him what I know myself. There is another matter I wish to mention, and that is that anonymous letter. Has any one any idea who sent it?"

"I rather think it was Eve," said Mary, "because I heard her laughing so that Sunday morning when you were all in the square."

"It is just like her: I believe it was she too. Now, how shall we pay her out?" said Harold.

"If you take my advice you will leave Eve alone; I think we have had enough of interfering with her, for a nice flock of geese we looked that morning, I must say. I advise that the next time we any of us see Eve we meet her as if nothing had happened," said St. John.

"Do you mean to let her out of Coventry?" asked Harold.

"Yes," said St. John, "let us begin afresh altogether. I dare say Eve is sorry enough now for the mischief she has done."

"She is indeed, St. John, but thank you for saying that. I am sure you would all agree to forgive her if you saw how unhappy she is now," said Mary.

Eve was such a general favourite, and such an acquisition to the meetings, that they readily agreed to St. John's proposal, and Mary was commissioned to inform her sister of their decision.

Eve took it very humbly, which was a sure sign of the reality of her penitence. She had had enough of Coventry, and was by no means inclined to carry out her former threat of putting the others in as soon as they let her out; moreover, she had had her revenge, which had been as successful as even she desired, and she was content now to accept the flag of truce held out to her. A few days later, Mr. Sandys had made such slow but sure progress, that Eve thought she might venture to ask her father to take her note to him. Dr. Marshall agreed, and Eve waited anxiously for an answer. The letter was delivered in the morning, and when her father came home in the evening from his second visit, he handed Eve an envelope directed by Mrs. Sandys, saying that the enclosed was written by Mr. Sandys,

I was the first time he had attempted to put pen paper since his illness. Eve did not open the envelope till she was alone, and then she found only a word "Forgiven" in a very shaky hand, which was just recognised as Mr. Sandys's, but that one word sent her to sleep that night very happy.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.

ST. JOHN by no means relished the idea of interviewing Colonel Sandys on the subject of the robbery. It was an exceedingly unpleasant task to have to suggest to him that his son was the thief, and yet he scarcely saw how to avoid it. As he was president of the "Little Bricks," he was bound to attend to all matters of importance connected with the club; besides, he was responsible for the money which had been entrusted to his care, and even if he had had the means of replacing the stolen sum, it would not have been satisfactory to the rest of the committee unless the mystery was cleared up as to the thief. He put off speaking of it for as long as he dared in the hope that Mr. Sandys would soon be well enough to see to it himself, but on hearing from Dr. Marshall that worry of any description might cause a relapse, for the consequences of which he would not be responsible, St. John made up his mind to get it over as soon as possible, and called upon Colonel Sandys for that purpose. St. John happened to be

Favourite of Colonel Sandys's, who accordingly met him very cordially, which cordiality only had the effect of making St. John feel more nervous than ever. Mastering his nervousness, he gave Colonel Sandys a clear statement of the case, not venturing his opinion on the subject but merely relating the true facts.

"Do I understand from you that Roger has a key to this box?" was Colonel Sandys's first inquiry; and on St. John's answering in the affirmative, he proposed to send for Roger and question him.

"I don't think it will be any use, sir. I know all Mr. Sandys could get out of Roger was that he had lost the key."

"Do you know what my brother's opinion on the latter was?"

"Yes, he told me he suspected Roger, but I hope you will not ask me any more questions, Colonel Sandys. I was in duty bound to lay the matter before you, and I need not say what an exceedingly painful task this has been."

"You have acted rightly, but at present I can say nothing to Roger unless I have some evidence against him stronger than the mere fact of his possessing a second key to this cash-box."

St. John agreed to this, but did not mention that he had lent Roger two pounds to buy a lexicon, and had recently discovered that the lexicon had never been bought.

"One thing I can and will do at once, and that is, I will make up the loss of the three pounds, whether or no Roger be guilty," added Colonel Sandys, and St. John soon after took his leave, with three sovereigns for the "Little Bricks" in his pocket.

Proof of Roger's guilt was soon to come to ~~his~~ father's ears from another source. Harold, ever since Mr. Sandys's illness, had been regretting inwardly that he had never told his father of his disobedience in yielding to Roger and going with him to Price's house. When Mr. Sandys lay unconscious, hovering between life and death, Harold resolved that, if he ever recovered, he would tell him that he had deceived him; and at the very time when St. John was interviewing Colonel Sandys, Harold was with Mr. Sandys confessing his fault: he could not do this without inculpating Roger to some extent, and the fact that Roger was in the habit of playing cards with Price only confirmed Mr. Sandys in his suspicions. He was too weak to talk more about it on that day, but on the following he told Colonel Sandys what he had learnt from Harold, and also from St. John, about the lexicon.

Roger's guilt seemed now so fully established, that Colonel Sandys determined to act upon what he knew, and for this purpose sent for his son. — The interview was short, but strikingly unpleasant for Roger, who had cause to remember it painfully for some time to come. His father's scathing words of

r scorn and contempt cut him as deeply as his
ng-whip, and left a more lasting mark. Colonel
lys ended by ordering Roger to remain in his
room until he was fitter company for honest
le; and, having dismissed him, went to the
ring-room, and forbade May and the boys to
e any communication with him, until he gave
a leave.

oger's feelings when he reached his own room
e by no means happy, and yet so great had his
of being found out been ever since his father
rned, that it was a relief to know the worst had
e, was perhaps over, though he was not certain
t future punishment was in store for him. He
lately felt so disgusted with himself for his dis
estry, besides being tired of the life he had been
ing, which had been a series of deceitful actions,
he was really glad an end had at last come to
What became of him in the future, in his present
d he cared very little about, beyond shrinking
meeting the rest of the family, who with the
shall must know of his disgrace. Under these
imstances, he was not sorry to be confined to
own room. When he thought over his father's
nful reproaches, he could not help feeling that
fusing to acknowledge his guilt to his uncle he
only fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire;
though Mr. Sandys might have punished him as
rely as his father had done, Roger knew well

enough his anger for the sin would have been tempered with pity for the sinner; he would have drawn the whole story from the boy's lips, he would have made allowances for the temptation he had been placed in, for the dupe he had been made, for his former bringing-up; he would have taken into consideration the shame and disgrace which, as the natural consequences of such a fall, must necessarily follow, and he would not have spoken to him as if he were an outcast almost too vile to be reclaimed.

Roger was sitting in the dark, for neither supper nor a light had been brought to him, thinking of all this and wondering how long he was to be kept a prisoner and whether he was to go to school the next day, when his door opened gently and he heard May's voice whisper, "Roger."

"I am here, but go away May, I am not fit for any one to speak to," said Roger, bitterly.

May's answer after closing the door was to creep up to her brother and throw her arms round his neck, sobbing passionately.

"May! go away. Do you know I am a thief?" said Roger, trying to disentangle May's arms from him.

"I know, but I love you just the same, only I am so sorry. Oh, Roger, why did you do it, dear? I thought you were so noble and good."

"Don't, May," said Roger, bursting into tears, and for some minutes it was difficult to say who cried

the harder. May was the first to recover, and then she did her best to comfort her brother. "What made you come here, May? Father said I was to see no one," said Roger after a pause.

"I could not help it. I must see you, Roger; it is very wicked of me I know, to disobey papa but I can't help it. I shall come to-morrow night if you are still here. I must go now, so good-night."

"Don't go yet, May, I want to tell you all about it. Perhaps when you know how bad I am you will be like father and scorn me, though I don't think you will," said Roger.

So May stayed and heard the history of Roger's disgrace from the beginning of his acquaintance with Price down to his interview with his father. It was a relief to him to tell it, for Colonel Sandys had merely accused him of borrowing money from St. John under false pretences, gambling this and all his pocket-money away, and finally robbing the "Little Bricks" for the same purpose, and as Roger could not deny his guilt, had dealt summarily with the case.

"May," said Roger, when he had finished, "I should like Uncle Charlie to know it all, he won't be so hard on me quite as father, I am sure; will you tell him when you see him?"

May promised, and then stole away to her own room, in fear and trembling lest any one should meet her, for she was by no means certain Colonel Sandys might not beat her as well as Roger, if he knew she

had dared to disobey him, but timid as she was, love was a stronger passion than fear with May : had Mr. Sandys forbidden her to visit Roger, she would have yielded, but then she had learnt to love him dearly, while Colonel Sandys was quite a stranger to her, and it is nonsense to suppose that if parents and children are separated for years, and that when the children are too young to remember ever having been with the parents, that when they meet, the natural love for a father or a mother will burst suddenly into full bloom. It won't do anything of the kind, it must be a gradual and a growing love, based on mutual knowledge, as well as on mere blood relationship. And at present Colonel Sandys was not going the way to work to win this love from his little daughter ; his harshness to Roger was sufficient in itself to repel her, and his naturally cold and somewhat proud manner, though he was gentle enough to May, frightened the sensitive child and made her shrink into herself pretty much as she had done when she first came to her uncle's.

If Mr. Sandys had been well and amongst them all, he would have done much to break down the barriers between the father and child ; but he knew little of what was going on below while he lay slowly regaining strength upstairs. And if he guessed how matters stood, when May told him sorrowfully the story of Roger's guilt, he said nothing to her at the time, but merely sent a message to Roger, that

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hoped he would think seriously over his conduct, and ask forgiveness of God for his sin. He wrote it on a piece of paper and gave it to May to put under Roger's door, never dreaming that the child would venture near her brother after Colonel Sandys's libation. It did not occur to him to ask May even she had seen Roger, and though she intended tell him the truth if he put the question, she did not volunteer the information, fearing lest her uncle would add his veto to her father's. Roger was kept in his room all that day, and if the servants had carried out Colonel Sandys's orders strictly, would have had only bread and water to live upon, but the cook being an old servant took upon herself to defy this arrangement, and sent some sandwiches and tea up for his supper, which Roger not knowing his diet had been limited to bread and water ate with a clear conscience.

That night May paid another visit to Roger, who was very glad to see her, as he was getting very tired of being alone all day with nothing to do except read, and fortunately he had some books in his room. It was Friday, and May was very anxious about the meeting of "Little Bricks" to be held the next day. She did not wish to be present, as Colonel Sandys had announced his intention of going instead of his brother to settle the matter of the robbery. Roger being anxious to know the feeling of the committee towards him, and rather curious to hear

how much of his conduct was to be divulged to them, persuaded May to go and tell him in the evening all that happened. So May went, hating it exceedingly, but willing to do anything to please Roger. To her joy and surprise Eve was there, so she knew she had some one to support her if Roger was blamed too severely, for abuse of the absent was not one of Eve's failings, and she would stand up for May against all the committee the president and Colonel Sandys included, if need be.

Eve had that morning received a message from Mr. Sandys who was now able to sit up for several hours daily, to the effect that he was well enough to see her if she liked to pay him a visit. Eve liked and yet did not like to do so, but knowing that she must meet him sooner or later, she chose to go at once and get the unpleasantness over as soon as possible. It was easier than she had imagined, for when she walked into the room, Mr. Sandys held out his hand and said, before she had time to speak :

"Don't say any more about it, my child. Your letter was an ample apology, and I am sure you have felt very sorry, so we will let bygones be bygones. I wanted to see you to-day, to tell you you may return to the 'Little Bricks' this afternoon, if you don't mind writing a little note for me to St. John which I will dictate, for my head soon gets muddled if I attempt letter-writing."

Eve delighted to be of any use, and also overjoyed



"I am sure you have felt very sorry, so we will let bygones
be bygones."—*Page 198.*



to find she was allowed to return to the club, fetched some paper and wrote as follows :—

“ MY DEAR ST. JOHN,—Eve writes this at my dictation to tell you that she and I are friends again, and I wish you all to do as I have done, forget the past which we all regret, and receive her back to the club as a member of the committee. Colonel Sandys will speak to you on the sad subject of Roger this afternoon in my unavoidable absence. I am getting on slowly but I trust surely.”

Here Mr. Sandys took the pen from Eve’s hand and signed the note, which was sent at once, and on the strength of it Eve appeared at the meeting, and was met by all the others as if nothing had happened, and indeed by the side of Roger’s crime, Eve’s offence looked very trivial.

Colonel Sandys with true military punctuality arrived as the clock struck three, looking as Eve could not help remarking to Harold, all the world over as if he were going to hold a court-martial, instead of about to superintend a committee-meeting of the “ Little Bricks.” Naturally a stern-looking man, he was sterner than ever as he marched up to the table and bowed gravely to the committee.

“ I have come to-day to perform a very painful duty, as I think you will all agree when you have heard what I have to say. You are all of course aware that your society was robbed a fort-

night ago of three pounds, but you will some of you perhaps be surprised when I tell you that the thief is my son, my only son, Roger. I blush to say so but it is only too true, Roger is a thief and a liar and unfit for the society of honourable gentlemen. At present I have not decided what I shall do with him, nor does it concern this meeting, to whom I need only say how bitterly I regret my son's conduct, which unfortunately it is past my power to undo, except by refunding the stolen money, as I have already done to your president. Mr. Sandys wishes me to add that he hopes you will all try to exercise Christian charity and forbearance towards my unhappy boy; but please understand clearly, this is his wish, not mine. I do not ask from you what I should not give if I were in your position. I trust your society may be more fortunate in the future than it hitherto appears to have been, and I wish you all good-day."

So saying, Colonel Sandys made another grand bow and left the room, much to the relief of the committee, who felt as if an iceberg had been suddenly removed from their midst, so freezing was the atmosphere which surrounded their visitor.

"Don't cry May, Mr. Sandys would not have spoken so, however bad Roger might have been," said Eve to May, who was sobbing bitterly all through her father's speech.

"It was more Price's fault than Roger's, he tempted

im and cheated him out of all his money," sobbed say, with her head on the table, and her long hair ring across it like a Magdalene's.

"Never mind, May. I am very sorry for Roger, and for your sake I won't throw him overboard," said St. John.

This comforted May, for she was very anxious that St. John should not cut Roger; she knew well enough Gerard and Harold, however much they might feel disgusted with him, would receive him again kindly, so soon as Colonel Sandys allowed them to do so; and as for the Marshalls, Mary was too good, and Eve too naughty herself, to turn their backs upon an arring companion. The usual business of the meeting was quickly settled, and they broke up, the president expressing a fervent hope that now, at least, the troubles of the "Little Bricks" were over, and that in future their meetings would be as pleasant as they had of late been disagreeable.

Alas! little did any of them think that one of their number would never again attend a meeting of the "Little Bricks," that, if ever they all met again, it would be not in this world but on the golden bough, never to part again. But we must not anticipate events.

That evening May went to Roger's room to tell him about the meeting, as she had promised, and on the whole her account was more favourable than he had hoped, at least as regarded the feeling of the

rest of the committee towards him. His father's speech was very much what Roger had anticipated it would be; one thing in it surprised him, and that was to hear that Colonel Sandys had not yet decided what to do with him.

"Do you know what I think he means by that May? I believe he is going to send me away to some boarding-school, and a nice time I shall have of it, if he tells the master as he is sure to do of all this," was Roger's comment on his father's speech.

"Send you away from me! Separate us! Oh! Roger, surely he would never be so cruel. I wish he had kept in India, that I do. If you are sent away I will go too, I will, no one shall stop me," exclaimed May.

"You could not, May, it would be impossible."

"O Roger! I could not live without you; it would kill me. Let us run away together, Roger, before he tries to separate us."

"Well, we may as well wait till we know for certain what he is going to do. It is only my idea—I may be quite wrong, you know," said Roger.

May was not to be so easily reassured, and in her distress she stayed later than usual in Roger's room. At last, hearing footsteps approaching which she thought belonged to her aunt, she rose to go.

"There is Aunt Minnie coming upstairs to bid me 'good-night.' O Roger! what shall I do? I

am not even undressed, and I ought to be in bed. She will find out where I have been."

"Not if you are very quick. Jump into bed with your clothes on, and undress after she has gone away."

Resolving to act on this advice, May let herself gently out and flew to her own room, but to her terror found she was too late: Mrs. Sandys was already there, wondering at her absence.

"May!" she exclaimed, astonished to see May still dressed, "where have you been?"

"To see Roger," said May, looking rather crest-fallen.

"May! I am very sorry. It was very wrong of you to disobey your father so deliberately. I must tell him of you."

May implored Mrs. Sandys to spare her, but it was in vain as she knew, for both her aunt and uncle regarded disobedience as a very serious offence, and she went to bed that night dreading the morning, and wondering what Colonel Sandys would do to her. If he were to beat her it would not surprise her much, she looked upon him as such a terrible person.

When she came down to breakfast the next morning she knew at once Mrs. Sandys had told him of her disobedience, for he did not kiss her as usual, but simply said,

"I want you after breakfast, May."

Poor May ate very little breakfast under these circumstances, and though she dreaded the meal coming to an end, still it seemed that the rest of the family had better appetites than usual, they were so long over breakfast. At last one after the other rose and left the table, until Colonel Sandys, who generally remained to smoke a cigar, and May were the only people in the room.

"I understand from your Aunt Minnie that you were in Roger's room last evening, in spite of my orders to the contrary. Is this the case, May?" said Colonel Sandys to his little girl, whom he had beckoned to stand before his chair.

"Yes, I have been every night," said May trembling.

"I am glad to find that you are truthful though disobedient; but as I fear Roger's society may corrupt you still further, I shall separate you. Roger will go to school in Belgium next week, I shall take him myself, and I hope when he is gone you will learn to be a good little girl. I shall not punish you this time. You may go now."

"Not punish me!" thought May; "why, to separate me from Roger is the greatest punishment I could have." And she went sobbing to her own room, where she locked herself in, and utterly refused to undo the door to any one, saying she did not intend to go to church when Mrs. Sandys came to tell her it was time to get ready.

But she was not idle. She undressed and put on a double suit of underclothes to begin with, then she stuffed some clean handkerchiefs and stockings into her pocket; she then unlocked a little box and took out a few trinkets that belonged to her mother, which she sewed up in a little bag and tied round her neck, she put a nightdress and some shoes into a little reticule her aunt had given her to carry her books to and from the Marshalls', and then she waited at the window to see how many of the family were going to church.

Presently out came Harold and Gerard, who walked slowly down the Square, and May began to fear no one else was going, in which case the little plan in her head would fall to the ground, but in a minute or two Colonel Sandys came down the steps, and with him to May's joy Mrs. Sandys.

This was better than she had dared to hope for; there was no one at home then but Mr. Sandys, Roger, herself, and two servants. Delighted to think the coast was clear, May put on her outdoor things in feverish haste, and then hastened to Roger's room.

"Why, May, how queer you look; what have you done to yourself?" was Roger's greeting.

"I have been crying, and I have put on a lot of clothes which makes me look fat. But Roger, listen, we must run away this morning, be quick, there is

no one at home except Uncle Charlie, and he can't leave his room, we shall never have such an opportunity again; and Papa is going to take you away to a school in Belgium next week."

"Belgium! But, May, I have no money, and where are we to run to?"

"I have five shillings, and I have some things we can sell, a gold brooch and some earrings, and we shan't want much money; we shall do for clothes, it is only food we shall want and a place to sleep in. Do come, Roger, and be quick."

Roger, who was longing to get out into the air again, did not raise any objection, though he was by no means so hopeful as to the success of the scheme as May seemed to be.

"But where are we to go?" he asked, as May stuffed his pockets full of socks and other small articles of apparel, while he put on his boots.

"I don't know, but we are sure to think of a place as we go along, only let us be quick and get out of the house as soon as possible," said May, who seemed to have lost all her natural timidity in her excitement.

Roger yielded to her entreaties, and in a few minutes they were ready to start; they crept noiselessly past Mr. Sandys's room, and then downstairs to the hall, where, hearing one of the servants coming up the kitchen stairs, they took refuge in the dining-room till she had passed, and then making a dash

before any one should appear to hinder them, they reached the street in safety.

Two hours later Mrs. Sandys returned from church, and was somewhat alarmed to find Roger and May were nowhere to be found ; Mr. Sandys had managed to get as far as Roger's room about twelve o'clock, wishing to speak to him, but to his surprise no Roger was there ; supposing he had been allowed to go to church, he was not alarmed until the rest of the family returned without him.

Colonel Sandys did not share in the anxiety his brother seemed to feel, he concluded the young monkeys were tired of the house, and had gone for a walk, and in all probability would be back by dinner-time. Dinner was early on Sunday, but it had been over some time, and still no sign of Roger or May, when Mrs. Sandys, now seriously frightened, went to their respective rooms to see if they had left any note to say when they would be back ; presently she came to Colonel Sandys, looking very white, and said :

“ Edmund, I don't at all like this, May has taken her shoes and an entire set of linen with her, besides other little things, and Roger seems to have done the same. I believe the children have run away.”

“ Nonsense, Minnie,” said Colonel Sandys, trying to conceal the anxiety he felt, “ where on earth should they go : I don't suppose they have five shillings between them ; they will be in to tea, no doubt.”

They were not in to tea though, nor to supper, and by this time the whole family were seriously alarmed; they sent round to the Marshalls', to the Woods', and even to the Prices', but none of these had seen or heard of the children.

Colonel Sandys endeavoured to pooh-pooh the whole matter, saying that they were old enough to take care of themselves, and that when they were tired of wandering about the streets they would be glad enough to come home; but though he put this bold face on it, he was really by no means sure of their safe return, and he passed a sleepless night thinking of them. When the morning came, and still no children returned, he no longer strove to appear indifferent, but went out resolved to leave no stone unturned to find them. He put the matter in the hands of the police, he advertised in the agony column of all the daily papers, he had bills printed and placarded in the neighbourhood, he telegraphed to all his relations to know if the children had been seen or heard of by any of them, but all in vain, nothing was heard of them that day or the next, until Wednesday morning, a cab drove up to the door, throwing the whole household into a state of excitement.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOLDEN SHORE.

NEITHER May nor Roger had the least idea where to go when they left the house ; whether to turn to the right or the left was doubtful, and they only chose the left because they were sooner out of sight of the house that way than the other. Presently the brilliant idea struck May that travelling by water was cheaper than any other mode of transport, and she suggested they should make their way to the river and get on board a steamer. Roger fell in with the plan, and they soon found themselves on board a crowded penny steamer bound for Hammersmith. At first May did not at all like the company she found herself amongst, but by degrees she grew interested in watching the various buildings they steamed past, and she soon forgot any one was present except Roger, to be with whom was happiness enough in itself.

At Hammersmith they got out, and walked about in an aimless way, thinking what to do next and beginning to feel hungry, when suddenly Roger felt

himself clapped on the shoulder, and looking round found himself face to face with Montague.

"Hulloa, Roger! what are you doing here?"

"Can you keep a secret, Montague?" was Roger's reply, and Montague replying he could, Roger proceeded to enlighten him as to what he and May were doing.

"Well," said Montague, "it strikes me the best thing you can both do is to go home again; if it were summer time we could have managed the business easily enough. I am staying with my married sister down here, and my brother-in-law has a boat in which we could have very well lived for a week or so, but that is impossible at this time of year."

"Is there a cabin in it? Could we have slept there?"

"Rather! Jack and his wife often go up to Oxford and back in it in the summer."

"Where is it now?" asked Roger.

"Moored close here. While this weather lasts Jack takes it out constantly. But why?"

"Look here, Montague. Will you do us a good turn? May we sleep in this boat for a few nights? You see we have only a few shillings with us, and they won't last long if we have to pay for lodgings."

Montague thought for a few minutes, and was on the point of refusing, when a glance at May's pleading face altered his decision.

"I believe I can manage it for you, as Jack's man

owes me a good turn ; he is rather given to drink, and I have stood between him and his master more than once. I'll try : you meet me here at three this afternoon. By the way, how are you going to get any grub to-day ? "

" I shall look about for a coffee-shop or chop-house," said Roger.

" You may do that for yourself, but there is no place open about here where you can take your sister ; so I'll try and smuggle some food down for her this afternoon ; she might wait in that church while you get some dinner, I can't bring enough for both," said Montague, who was beginning to take a lively interest in the runaways.

Roger acted on this suggestion, and having left May who was both cold and tired comfortably seated in the church Montague had pointed out, he went and had some dinner, which cost him nine-pence ; he then came back, and waited with May till it was time to meet Montague.

They sat silent for about half an hour, Roger feeling rather sleepy after his dinner, and May wishing she could have something to eat for she was hungry, when Montague poked his head in at the door and beckoned them to come out.

" I have seen Simpson, and it is all right," he said, as soon as they were all three outside the church ; " you can go on board as soon as it is dusk, and you can stay till ten the next morning, but no later, for

Jack may be down there any hour of the day, and Simpson would be sent off like a shot if he found you out. Come with me now, and I'll take you to the boat; we can go on board for a few minutes, as Jack is asleep, but you had better not remain till it is dark, then you are safe enough."

Ten minutes' walk took them down to the river which looked deserted and uninviting, no boats being in sight except the one belonging to Montague's brother-in-law, which was moored close to the bank. It was a small sailing-boat, with a tiny cabin, the roof of which alone was visible as they jumped into the boat, and May wondered where in the world they were supposed to find any shelter on board this trim little vessel, but when Montague raised the cabin-door, and having leapt down himself, held out a hand to May, she found that though the accommodation was very limited in the small cabin, still there was plenty of room for two bigger people than May and Roger, and at any rate they would have a roof over their heads for the night.

There were two berths, which were not of course made up as beds but were like sofas; still, they were cushioned and with a rug one might be tolerably comfortable for a night.

"I'll make Simpson put you a couple of rugs, and if you can wait till six, I'll bring you some dinner; I have put it all ready in a basket, but I dare not be seen with it in broad daylight," said Montague.

May, who was really nearly famished, said she could very well wait, and then the trio set off for a walk to kill the time till they could safely take possession of their new quarters; May bore up bravely, but she was dreadfully tired, and the want of food made her feel quite faint. Happily for her, the boys noticed she looked tired, and left her in a church while they went on, promising to call for her on their return. The afternoon service was half over when May got in, and being shown into a cushioned pew, she fell asleep and presently woke to find herself alone in the church. It was getting dusk, and she went to the door to look for Roger and Montague, whom to her relief were just coming for her. By this time, Montague declared there was no danger of his brother coming down to the boat, so the two runaways went on board, while Montague went home for May's dinner, which she was by no means sorry to have.

"You will find plenty of places open to-morrow where you can feed," said Montague, "if you can manage with this to-day; it is cold chicken and bread, I could not get anything else. Look here, in this cupboard there are some plates and cups and saucers, but you will have to manage without a knife and fork, and you had better put this bit of candle out as soon as possible. Here are the rugs, and now I must be off; I'll look in early in the morning to see how you are. Good-night;" and not waiting for

the thanks May eagerly offered him, Montague took his departure.

There was more chicken than May could eat, so Roger shared it with her, and then being tired out and rather cold they turned in. Undressing was out of the question; moreover, it was too cold, so they only took off their boots and hats, and then rolling themselves in their rugs they were soon fast asleep.

The next morning they were awakened by Montague shouting to know how they were. He took Roger away with him to forage for breakfast, as he expressed it; meanwhile May washed and did her hair, so that when Roger returned she looked none the worse for not having slept in a bed. He brought some milk and new rolls quite hot from the baker's with him, on which they made an excellent breakfast, and the day being luckily bright and sunny they decided to go by a penny steamer to Westminster, and spend the day sightseeing. They were both in capital spirits, having, as they thought, fallen on their feet, and without giving the future a thought they determined to enjoy the present; there were still May's ornaments to fall back on when they had exhausted the five shillings. Accordingly they visited Westminster Abbey, and spent a great part of the morning there; then they went to the Lowther Arcade and the National Gallery. One great advantage of this latter resort was, it was

warm and they could rest, and then having had nothing all day since breakfast, they went to a pastry-cook's and indulged in some patties and tartlets. By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and they only just caught the last boat back to Hammersmith. That night May felt the cold so, she did not sleep well; and the next day was unfortunately wet; they dare not remain in the boat after ten o'clock, and as paddling about in the rain without an umbrella is not very exhilarating work, they began to feel somewhat depressed, especially May, who was feeling ill also.

At last Roger suggested they should take an omnibus to Oxford Street, and spend the day in the Soho Bazaar. This they did, and a very weary day it was, for May hardly knew how to get about, her legs ached so much. At last she persuaded Roger to go back to the boat, saying she would rather be found out than walk any more; she longed to be able to lie down, and perhaps if she had a good rest she would be well the next day.

They could not meet with an omnibus for some time, during which the rain came down heavily, and May got very wet. At last a Hammersmith omnibus appeared, and in half an hour's time they reached the boat. May's jacket and dress were wet through, and even her petticoats were damp, when she reached the boat, while her feet had been wet all day. She took off her dress and jacket, and put

her night-dress over her other damp clothes, and then threw herself on the sofa shivering and breathing heavily. Roger had fared better, his thick boots and greatcoat had kept him pretty dry, so he insisted on giving May his rug as well as her own, and in spite of the cold soon fell asleep. He was awakened in the night by May's moans, and going to her he found her very feverish and her breathing very bad.

"May, do you feel very ill?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, dear, it hurts me so to breathe, and I ache all over," muttered May.

"Oh, May! What shall we do? Do you think you'll be better in the morning?"

"Perhaps so, dear," whispered May, pressing Roger's hand.

"I wish it were daylight, it is so dark that I can't see the time by my watch, and we have no matches left. May, shall I go and see if I can knock up some doctor?" asked Roger.

"No, no, Roger, don't leave me, please don't. I daren't be left alone here, and it hurts me to talk."

Roger was dreadfully frightened. He knew his sister was very ill, and he was utterly powerless to help her, and as he sat holding her hand through the long hours till it was daylight, he went through an agony of fear. Suppose May were to die, how should he ever forgive himself or face any of the family again? In his distress he fell on his knees,

and prayed to God to help him ; but his prayer brought him but little comfort ; there was a wall between God and him which he felt unable to break down. The wall was his sin, and he might just as well attempt to behold the face of a friend through a stone wall, as to try to hold communion with his Heavenly Father, until he had laid down his sins at the foot of the Cross. Prayer for others is impossible until we are ourselves reconciled to God.

At length the day broke, and hope revived in Roger's breast, though the sunlight streaming into the little cabin revealed May's drawn face, with a pink flush on each cheek.

"May," said Roger, "I have made up my mind we must go home ; I will take all the blame, and as long as you get well, I don't care what they do to me. I shall get a cab now, and we will go ; Simpson must lend us those rugs, for your dress and jacket are still wet. If you don't mind I will get him to help me to carry you into the cab when I come back."

"I could not walk, dear ; be quick back, please ; I am glad we are going home," said May sadly. No need to tell Roger to be quick, he was too much alarmed to waste any time, and in a quarter of an hour they were on their way home, May lying full length on the back seat of the cab, and Roger sitting anxiously watching her on the opposite one. Their arrival caused no little excitement, for May,

bundled up in the rugs, had to be carried into the house by her father, who with the rest of the family except Mr. Sandys had rushed to the door.

"They are found. Father, here they are, May and Roger; but May is very ill; Uncle Edmund is carrying her upstairs," said Harold, rushing in to Mr. Sandys's room.

"Thank God," exclaimed Mr. Sandys, going on to the landing to see for himself what was happening, just as Colonel Sandys with May in his arms reached the top of the stairs.

"Put her in this room, she will want all Minnie's care," said Mr. Sandys, as he bent over May, on whose face death had already laid his cold hand. So May was put on a bed in her uncle's dressing-room, and Dr. Marshall sent for at once, while Roger — answered all the questions put to him as to where — they had been, what they had been doing, when May — was taken ill, et-cetera. Not a word of blame was spoken by any one; Mrs. Sandys was already bending tenderly over May, while Mr. Sandys drew Roger — close to him and put his arm round his neck, while the boy told him as briefly as possible their adventures and their reason for running away. Roger's anxiety on May's account was so evident to all, and his self-reproach for having been to some extent the cause of her illness, was so great that all pitied him, and forbore from censuring him in any way.

Dr. Marshall was by no means hopeful as to May's state. She had acute inflammation of the lungs, and it was likely to go very hard with her, for she was a delicate child. All that day and night Mrs. Sandys never left her, and Roger begged so hard to be allowed to remain in the room that she had not the heart to refuse him.

The next day May was worse, and Dr. Marshall gave no hope of her recovery. She half guessed the danger she was in, and when Mr. Sandys came to see her asked him point-blank if she were dying.

"Would it frighten you, my little May, if you knew you were very dangerously ill?" he asked.

"No," said May, "not now. You have taught me to know our Lord, Uncle Charlie, and I shall be happier with Him than if I lived to be a woman. I am sorry for poor Roger though, and I am sorry I disobeyed father and ran away from you; at least it was not from you, Uncle Charlie," and May looked fondly up at her uncle.

"I know, my little one," said Mr. Sandys sadly, and then he knelt down and prayed that if it were God's will, He would even now give back this dear little one to her earthly father's keeping; but that if He had need of her, those that were left might not rebel against His decision.

Later in the day May asked to be left alone with Roger, whose pale anxious face drew pity from all who saw him. What passed between them no one

but Roger ever knew, and years afterwards, when for the first time in his life he mentioned it to one dearer to him than even his child-sister, he said that from that day he was a changed boy ; May with her dying hand had lifted up the veil that hung between him and his Saviour, and kneeling by her death-bed he had laid bare his soul to that merciful Lord, Who alone had power to cleanse it in His redeeming Blood.

In the evening the end came somewhat suddenly. Since his illness Mr. Sandys had read family prayers in his own room to the family ; to-night, by May's request, he was about to do so in hers. The three boys, Mrs. Sandys, and Colonel Sandys, had all assembled and were kneeling down, when Mr. Sandys saw a change come over May's face, and to the surprise of all, instead of reading the usual prayer, he said the commendatory one from our service for the visitation of the sick. When he had finished May began to say aloud this verse of that most beautiful hymn, "There is a green hill."

" He died that I might be forgiven,
He died to make me good,
That I might go at last to Heaven,"

but here the weak voice failed, the childish lips closed never again to open, the little spirit had taken its flight, and it was Mr. Sandys's voice, which in broken accents finished the verse :

" Saved by His precious blood."

There was no more vocal prayer in that room that night, though for some time all remained kneeling. Roger's sobs alone broke the silence, and when at length he rose, and with passionate cries threw himself on the bed by the side of May, one by one the others crept away and left him alone with his dead.

Who shall tell what passed through Roger's mind in that dark hour, as he lay alone in an agony of grief and repentance by all that was left of his dear little sister who had loved him, alas ! too well ?

I said alone, but surely he was not alone then ; though no human eyes witnessed his suffering, may we not safely say that He Who wept by Lazarus's grave was near to comfort Roger also ?

Presently the door opened gently, and Roger felt himself lifted from the bed : looking up, he expected to see his uncle bending over him, but to his surprise it was his father, traces of tears still visible on that cold stern face, which was no longer cold or stern, but sad and suffering.

" Father," murmured Roger, and in the long embrace which followed, both father and son felt the barrier between them was broken down.

What passed between them matters not, no one was present, and neither of them ever spoke of it ; probably little was said on either side, for actions are sometimes more eloquent than words.

And May lay there like a pure white lily rudely severed from its stem, and to all who wondered why one so young had been taken, the answer, if hard to learn, was still simple enough—"The Lord had need of her."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

ROGER never knew the terrible anxiety his and May's absence had caused to the whole family; no one cared to add to his grief by telling him that his father had not been to bed for two nights, and had scarcely touched food from the Sunday till the Wednesday, when poor little May was carried from the cab to the house. Mr. Sandys had been so distressed at their absence that his wife and children were almost as anxious on his account lest he should have a relapse as they were for the safety of Roger and May. The Marshalls shared the general anxiety, and Eve spent all Monday and Tuesday with Gerard and Harold in going round to all the "Little Bricks" and their other acquaintances to make inquiries for them. But of all this Roger knew nothing; the few days that intervened between May's death and her funeral were spent by him in hovering about the room in which she lay; lying on the ground by the door when he was no longer allowed inside, until Colonel Sandys almost forced

him away, and induced him to go to a florist's with him to choose some wreaths and bouquets for her coffin and grave.

All the members of the "Little Bricks" were asked to May's funeral, not the committee only, but the whole club, and with one or two unavoidable exceptions all were present. She was their leading spirit, and for her sake they one and all determined to persevere in their work, though for some months her death and the blank it caused threw a gloom over the society.

Children and old people are alike in one respect, their sorrows are short-lived; and so, though all the "Little Bricks" were sincerely sorry when gentle little May died, and many of them wept bitterly at her grave, they soon ceased to miss her very much, and even the Marshalls and her cousins laughed and played as merrily as ever before many weeks had elapsed. Roger alone felt her loss more and more every day, and his only comfort seemed to be to talk of her to his father or uncle.

No one had as yet been asked to fill her place in the committee meetings, though Eve had taken the secretary's work, until one day, at the beginning of June, Mr. Sandys made his way to the Marshalls' school-room, where a meeting was being held. He had only been once since May's death, and that time had spoken very solemnly to them all about it, having previously requested that all the club should

be present. To-day he looked happier than usual, and the committee wondered what he had to say to them. They were not kept long in doubt, for he soon enlightened them.

"I have come to ask you all to do me a favour. Do you think you will be able to grant it?" he said, smiling, for he knew well enough there were few people who knew him well who would refuse him anything, certainly none of the "Little Bricks."

"Of course we will," they exclaimed, unanimously.

"Wait till you know what it is though. It concerns Roger. Perhaps you may not all know how changed he is in every way since May's death. Poor boy, it was a terrible blow to him, but it has proved a great blessing. I am thankful to say that both his father and I have every reason to believe he has not only repented bitterly of the past, but that he will never again be led astray. The only thing that gives us any anxiety about him now is, he shrinks too much from the society of other boys, and so we are anxious he should have something to interest him, that will lead him to mix with companions of his own age, and I think the "Little Bricks" would be the very thing for him, especially as for May's sake he takes a great interest in it. So I want you to ask him to take May's place in the committee."

"We shall be delighted to do so, sir; we had

thought of it ourselves, but we were not sure that it would meet with your approval," said St. John.

"Very well, then, that is settled. Now, as you have all done something for me, it remains for me to see if there is anything I can do for you. I suppose Miss Eve Marshall, now, can't suggest anything?" said Mr. Sandys with a comical glance at Eve.

"I think I will leave that to some of the others, Mr. Sandys. My suggestions are so often received with scorn," said Eve, wickedly.

"May I make a suggestion instead, Mr. Sandys?" asked Mary.

Mr. Sandys nodded assent.

"Would you be so very kind as to let us go back to your room for our meetings?"

"You have asked so prettily, Mary, I can't refuse. In fact, I thought Eve would have suggested it. I am quite sure she knew what I meant."

"I believe I did," said Miss Eve demurely.

"Do you see any objection to our inviting Roger to be our treasurer, sir?" asked St. John.

"None whatever; on the contrary, I think it advisable. It will show him that your trust in him is thoroughly re-established, and that in itself will act as a tonic on him. By all means do so."

So Roger that evening received a note in Eve's handwriting inviting him to be treasurer of the "Little Bricks;" he was very much pleased with it, and took it at once to his father and uncle. From

that day Roger began to look happier than he had done since he lost his little sister, he and St. John renewed their friendship, and by degrees all Roger's doings with Price seemed to him like a hideous dream.

The "Little Bricks" returned to the parish-room for their next meeting, and from that day everything seemed to go smoothly with them; all their troubles had been in their early days; now an occasional squabble between Eve and Roger was all that marred their tranquillity, and this only added a little piquancy to their meetings.

The society had been established at the end of September of the previous year, and, if they had not all left London for August and September, they would have been able to hand in fifty pounds before October, but their absence threw them back with their subscriptions, and it was not till the beginning of November that the fifty pounds were made up. The excitement of the " Little Bricks" was intense when the president summoned the whole club to a general meeting, at which it was intended to divulge to Mr. Sandys the secret object of the society. At length the day arrived, and Mr. and Mrs. Sandys were both invited to be present, and then amid prolonged cheers the president rose and made a short speech.

" Ladies and gentlemen, I have asked you to come here to-day, in order that you may hear me offer to

our dear friend and Rector the money we have collected. Mr. Sandys, I have much pleasure in handing over to you the sum of fifty pounds, the amount of one year's subscriptions from the 'Little Bricks;' we know that you have long wished to build a mission-room in this parish, and we started this society with that object in view; we hope that fifty pounds, if not sufficient in itself, will at any rate go a long way towards the building of this room, and we trust you will do us the honour of accepting it."

Mr. Sandys then rose and made an appropriate speech, saying how much he valued the desire, on their part, to do something to help the great work it was his privilege to be called upon to labour at; and how glad he was that, through all the drawbacks and checks which they had received, they had had the courage to persevere. He alluded touchingly to little May, whose heart had been thoroughly in their work, but who had been called to her rest before it was completed, an event which would set the mark of the cross upon the new mission-room, which he for one would seldom enter without thinking of that loving little soul. Then he went on to tell them the uses to which he meant to put the room; the chief of which was, to hold services for those poor wretched creatures who could not be persuaded to enter a church, to which, in point of fact, it was an ante-chamber. The building of the room would be begun almost immediately, for with the help of an architect

who had promised his services for nothing, and with what Mr. Sandys had already collected, their fifty pounds would cover all expenses, and it only remained for him now to offer them his most hearty thanks for what they had done, and to pray God to grant that their alms might be abundantly blessed to them.

The president then rose, and hoped that though the primary object of the "Little Bricks" had been accomplished, not without many difficulties and some pain, that the members would not now allow the society to fall entirely to the ground, as there were many other uses to which he was sure their money might be devoted. He therefore proposed that the club should continue to exist as before, with this difference, that the subscriptions should vary from one penny to one shilling a week, according to the means and charity of the subscriber. By this means they would be able to invite some of the poor of the district to join them, if Mr. Sandys approved of the suggestion.

Mr. Sandys did approve, the resolution was carried unanimously, and the meeting broke up amid general rejoicing.

In due course the mission-room was built, and it was a happy day for the "Little Bricks" when it was opened, though there was a shadow over their joy, caused by the absence of little May. And now we must take leave of them, since we cannot follow

their fortunes further, though perhaps a few words as to their future may be of interest.

Mr. Sandys, though grown very grey, is still living and working among his beloved poor; the mission-room having realised his hopes, and been the means of reaching many outcasts. He no longer works as hard as when the "Little Bricks" were first started, partly because he is not so strong and never has been since his accident, and partly because Gerard is his curate, and won't let him do too much.

Roger is in India; he passed well at Woolwich, and to his father's delight obtained an appointment in the Royal Engineers. He has never been anything but a comfort to his father since May's death, and the regiment which Colonel Sandys commands always considers the day on which he went to England on sick leave ten years ago as a red-letter one in its calendar. He went home an iceberg, they were wont to say, but the climate evidently thawed him, and he returned a man.

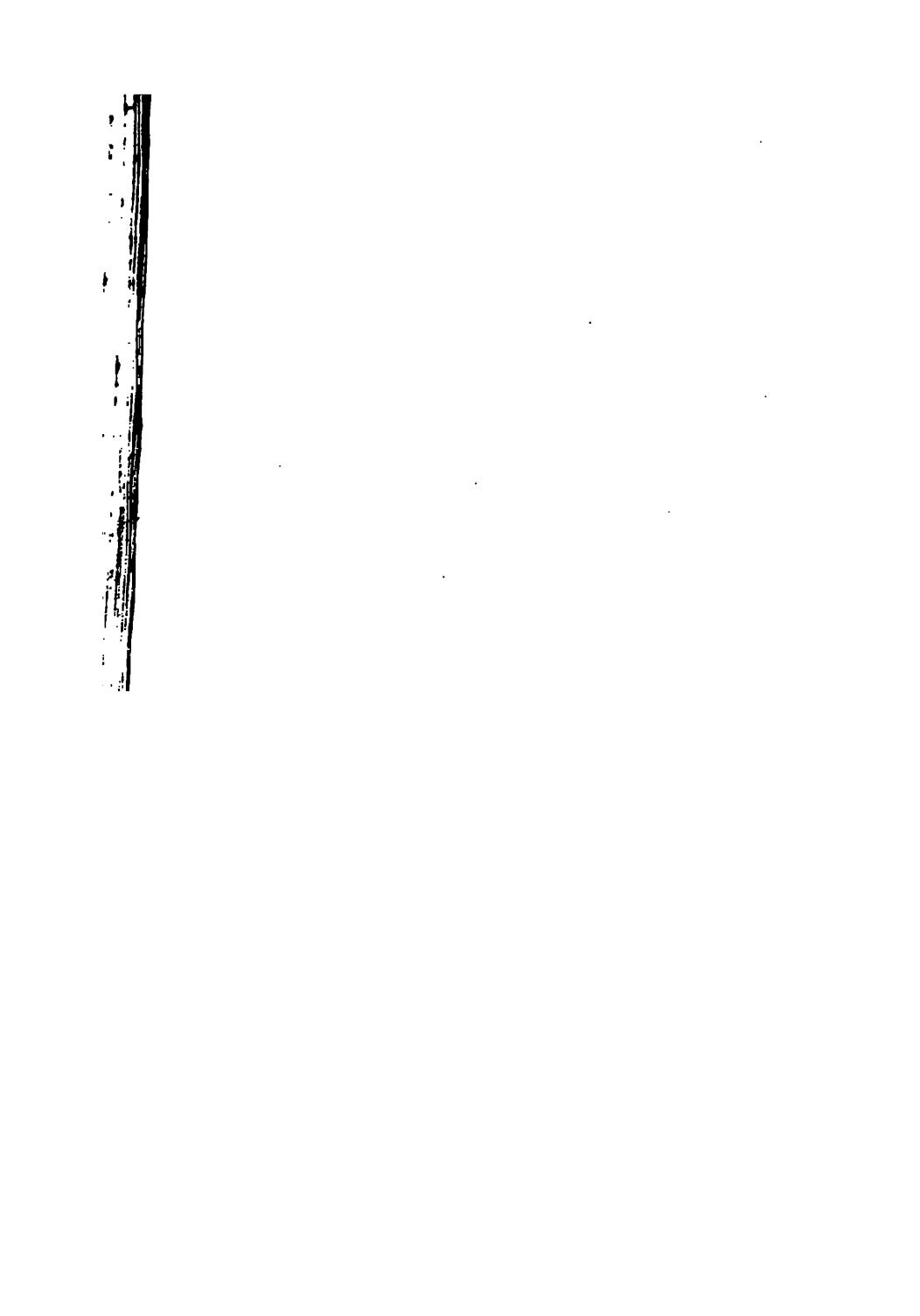
Harold is in the army, and has grown up a handsome fellow; his greatest trial is, he can't get his moustache to grow as quickly as he could desire, and he still gets into scrapes all through his bad luck in getting found out.

Eve is a beautiful girl, and every one wonders that she is still Eve Marshall, every one at least who does not know the interest she takes in the Indian mail, and who has not seen the pile of letters

signed "Roger" she keeps locked up in a drawer devoted to them; and who does not know that it is Roger's photograph and hair in the massive gold locket she always wears? Eve might have done far better for herself perhaps in a worldly point of view, but in Roger she has a treasure no money can equal—the love, the first and only love, of a good man.

Mary is single, she will never marry; she is as good as a second curate to Mr. Sandys, and he is quite satisfied with her work among the poor. Eve wonders at her often, but concludes there are women and women as the French proverb says, and is content that Mary should be happy in her way, as she is in hers. The "Little Bricks" still exist, though none of the original members now belong to it, one of the rules being that no one over twenty-one can remain in the club; they have recently adopted a badge introduced by an enterprising member, consisting of two bricks set up so as to form an arch, as a symbol of strength, and over them the one word, "Perseverance."

THE END.



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